South Haven Tribune

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March 1, 2026

Photos by Ron DeKett / HP correspondent

Jess Kolbe, the Campus for Creative Aging coordinator at the Region IV Area Agency on Aging, hosts a Memory Café on Feb. 9 at the Lincoln Township Public Library. A Memory Café is a place for those with dementia and their caregivers to engage in art, play games and puzzles, and learn about interesting topics.

Making more memories

Memory Cafés work to change stigma around dementia

By TONY WITTKOWSKI
Paxton Media Group

A new form of social gathering has been introduced in Southwest Michigan for a portion of the population and their caregivers who are affected by cognitive changes.

Through the use of a Berrien Community Foundation grant, the Region IV Area Agency on Aging and the Campus for Creative Aging has launched a series of Memory Cafés, which are available at three locations once a month.

"Memory Cafés are a place for those with dementia and their caregivers to engage in art, enjoy games and puzzles, and learn about interesting topics in a safe and welcoming environment," said Jess Kolbe, Campus for Creative Aging coordinator. "We have coffee, tea and snacks – like the usual coffee shop – to have fun without any stigma or fear.

Kolbe said the idea to bring these cafés to Berrien County was meant to change the stigma that comes with anyone who has been diagnosed with dementia.

More than 12,000 people in the tri-county area are diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's disease, Kolbe said. That number increases with the inclusion of family members and caregivers as well.

"We don't restrict our Memory Cafés to only being a spouse," she said. "Our goals are to reduce isolation, enhance quality of life and improve caregiver support. We offer pamphlets and talk to caregivers after the cafés to lead them to any there resources they need."

As of January, Memory Cafés have been offering activities and programming for three locations at the Niles District Library, New Buffalo Township Library and Lincoln Township Public Library.

If You Go

Memory Cafés offered by the Region IV Area Agency on Aging are hosted at three public libraries in Berrien County each month.

New Buffalo Township Library

- First Tuesday of the month, from 10-11 a.m.
- 33 N. Thompson St., New Buffalo

Niles District Library

- Second Thursday of the month from 10-11 a.m.
- 620 E. Main St., Niles

Lincoln Township Public Library

- Third Monday of the month from 1-2 p.m.
- 2099 W. John Beers Road, Stevensville

Jess Kolbe, the Campus for Creative Aging coordinator at the Region IV Area Agency on Aging, speaks about an activity during a Memory Café on Feb. 9 at the Lincoln Township Public Library.

Ken and Jan Sink participate in the Memory Café with the help of volunteer Jacqualin Paris on Feb. 9 at the Lincoln Township Library.

Shannon Brown, volunteer facilitator at the Region IV Area Agency on Aging, encourages participants at the Memory Café to perform mild exercises Feb. 9 at the Lincoln Township Public Library.

In New Buffalo, the library hosts its Memory Café from 10-11 a.m. on the first Tuesday of the month; from 10-11 a.m. the second Thursday of the month in Niles; and from 1-2 p.m. the third Monday of the month in Lincoln Township.

This past Monday, eight attendees gathered at the Lincoln Township library to flex their mental and physical muscles. Kolbe led a word association game, which prompted participants to mimic her movements from a seated position while finishing incomplete common phrases. Each person moved their shoulders or rotated an arm, all while identifying several "memory joggers" with music playing in the background. The phrases they were given to verbally say out loud included sayings like "Easier said than done" and "A penny for your thoughts."

Music have proved to be a recurring theme to the games and puzzles that are being offered at the Memory Cafés.

The eight attendees on Monday were given sheets to fill out their favorite kind of music genre and artists. The Area Agency on Aging partnered with a nonprofit that will generate a 60-song playlist that can be played for each participant on a regular basis through a "healing headset."

See **CAFÉS**, page A3

Drug bust in SH leads to multiple arrests

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Multiple arrests were made in connection to a recent narcotics search warrant conducted in South Haven.

According to a news release, Southwest Enforcement Team detectives issued a search warrant on Feb. 11 at a home in the 400 block of Hubbard Street in South Haven. The warrant and arrests were the result of an investigation into the alleged trafficking of narcotics in the South Haven area.

The enforcement team was assisted by patrol officers from the South Haven Police Department and Michigan State Police K-9 Unit.

"During the execution of the search warrant, officers located and seized more than one-half ounce of powder cocaine, along with multiple items indicative of drug distribution, including materials used for weighing and packaging narcotics," the release stated.

Additional suspected methamphetamine and analogue pills were located and seized by police. The pills will be submitted to a forensic laboratory for further analysis, police said. A loaded firearm was located near the cocaine.

As a result of the investigation, a 44-year-old South Haven resident was arrested and lodged at the Van Buren County Jail on charges of possession with intent to deliver cocaine; felony firearm; possession of crystal methamphetamine; and maintaining a drug house.

Additionally, a 42-year-old South Haven resident was arrested at the scene and lodged at the Van Buren County Jail on charges of possession of cocaine and maintaining a drug house.

"SWET will be seeking charges of possession of cocaine and possession of methamphetamine on a third individual who was not present at the time of the warrant," the release stated.

The enforcement team is comprised of sworn law enforcement officers from the Allegan County Sheriff's Office, Berrien County Sheriff's Office, Benton Harbor Department of Public Safety, Calhoun County Sheriff's Office, Covert Township Police Department, DEA, Kalamazoo Township Police Department, Michigan State Police, the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Pottawatomi Tribal Police Department, Portage Department of Public Safety, St. Joseph County Sheriff's Office and South Haven Police Department.

"The Southwest Enforcement Team and partnering agencies remain committed to investigating and prosecuting narcotics trafficking to ensure the safety and well-being of the South Haven community," the release stated.

The enforcement team is funded in part by the Michigan High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area as well as the U.S. Department of Justice, Byrne JAG grant.

Traffic signal upgrades in South Haven to start on March 2

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently announced upcoming traffic signal upgrades at the intersection of Phoenix Street and 73rd Street.

According to a news release, the work will modernize the intersection to current Michigan Department of Transportation standards.

The City's contractor, Severance Electric Co, Inc., will set up traffic control on March 2 and begin changing out the signals.

"Work is expected to be completed by March 7, unless unexpected delays are encountered," the release stated. "The intersection will be open during this duration."

For any questions or concerns, contact Mike Dopp at 269-637-0770 or via email at mdopp@southhavenmi.gov.

"We appreciate your patience and understanding of any inconvenience during this project," the release stated.

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OBITUARIES

Richard Shaffer

April 27, 1936 – Feb. 20, 2026

Richard Ray Shaffer, 89, of South Haven, Mich. passed away peacefully on Friday, Feb. 20, 2026. Richard was born April 27, 1936 to Raymond and Viola (Curtis) Shaffer in South Haven.

He is survived by his sister, Nancy Zink (Don Johnston) of Allegan, Mich. and four children: Wendy (Douglas) Bolling of Neligh, Neb., Stacy (Larry) Niles of Lawrence, Mich., William (fiancée Jessie) Shaffer of Portage, Mich., Debra (Ronald) Wall of South Haven. He is also survived by 10 cherished grandchildren and 14 loved great grandchildren.

Richard was preceded in death by his wife of 54 years, Sandra Shaffer, father, Raymond C. Shaffer, mother, Viola Shaffer (Curtis) and brother, James Shaffer.

Richard served in the Army National Guard from 1955 to 1958 and the U.S. Army Reserves from 1955-1963. Richard met his wife, Sandy Auensen, in South Haven. They were united in marriage on July 27, 1963 in South Haven.

Richard was a member of the Michigan Carpenters Union and Millwrights Local #1102 when he worked construction. Richard was also a member of various clubs including the South Haven Moose Lodge #697, the American Legion #49, the VFW #667, the South Haven Rod and Gun Club, the Steelheaders Association and the NRA.

Richard was an avid bowler, golfer and fisherman. Richard was a great hunter and accomplished several trophies but his favorite hunt was getting a large bull moose in Alaska in 2001.

He will be missed dearly by hundreds of family and friends.

A celebration of life is being planned for Richard at 1 p.m. on March 28 at the South Haven Moose Lodge in South Haven.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence, go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269.637-0333.

Larry Fragoules

Feb. 22, 1954 – Feb. 14, 2026

Larry Fragoules, born Feb. 22, 1954, passed away on Feb. 14, 2026, while in Naples, Fla., surrounded by his loving family. His passing came due to complications from his heroic battle against esophageal cancer. Though his life ended far too soon, it was a life lived with generosity, humor and an uncommon openness of heart.

Raised and rooted in Bangor, Mich., Larry spent his life contributing to the West Michigan community he loved. The son of George and Doris Fragoules, who preceded him in death, Larry grew up surrounded by a strong sense of family, a value he carried throughout his life.

An entrepreneur at heart, Larry built a life defined by hard work and imagination. He owned and operated Clearbrook Water Conditioning and Harbor Toy Co., businesses through which he formed lasting relationships and quietly touched countless lives. Harbor Toy Co. especially reflected his spirit: joyful, welcoming and always a little bit magical. Larry had a way of making everyone feel like a kid again.

He was a loyal fan of Michigan State University athletics as well as the Detroit Tigers and Lions. He loved gardening, fishing, camping and escaping to Disney World with his family, embracing the magic with the same enthusiasm he carried since childhood. Larry was, in the best way, a child at heart: playful, curious and filled with wonder.

Above all, Larry was caring. To know him was to feel supported and welcomed. Larry was a devoted father to his three children: Kim Natte (Jay), Adam Fragoules and Eric Fragoules. He cherished and was endlessly proud of his grandsons, Jason and Andrew.

He is also survived by his beloved sisters, Karen Acerra, Kathy Fragoules, and Denise Nordby (Jerry), as well as his many nieces and nephews who shared in his laughter, stories, and lifelong bonds.

A celebration of Larry's life will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. in an open-house format on March 15 at the American Legion of South Haven, Mich. Family and friends are invited to stop by, share memories and honor a man who made the world a brighter place. MSU or Lions attire is encouraged but not required.

In lieu of flowers, the family encourages memorial contributions in his honor to the Al Van Humane Society of South Haven.

Larry will be deeply missed and forever remembered by the family and community he held so close.

Shirley Rusin

Dec. 31, 1933 – Feb. 24, 2026

Shirley, age 92, passed away peacefully on Feb. 24, 2026.

She lived a life marked by devotion – to her family, her faith, her home and the blueberry fields she loved so dearly.

Born on Dec. 31, 1933, Shirley grew up in the Lutheran Church, which always held a special place in her heart and helped shape the steady, faithful spirit she carried throughout her life. She remained deeply connected to her roots and to her family heritage, often delighting in dropping a little German into conversation – especially when teaching Steve, Jacque and her niece Mikayla new words (including a few memorable German expressions that always brought laughter).

At the age of 42, Shirley married the love of her life, Richard "Dick" Rusin, and embraced not only marriage but the beautiful calling of building a home and family together.

She worked for many years at the Hardt Agency before dedicating herself fully to caring for her home and sharing long, hardworking hours in the blueberry fields. She loved working together in the blueberries and took great pride in the labor and life it represented.

She had a special fondness for her golf cart – especially its distinct horn – which she earned through her work in the blueberries. It became one of her trademarks and a reflection of her spirited personality.

Animals were one of Shirley's greatest passions. She loved all of their dogs deeply, with Andy, their beloved yellow lab, holding a particularly special place in her heart. She also loved gardening, finding peace and joy in tending to growing things and watching them flourish.

Shirley was known for her great sense of humor. She enjoyed laughter and lightheartedness – though she could never quite be convinced to play board games, much to her family's curiosity. She was also a wonderful cook, known for her well-done meats (a family joke she wore proudly) and pies that were simply the best.

She was a loving aunt to her nieces and nephews and extended that same love to her great and great-great nieces and nephews.

She is survived by her nieces and nephews Thomas Christiansen, Ryan Torp, Mikayla Torp, Hunter Torp and Cheri Cox, along with many beloved great and great-great nieces and nephews who brought her so much pride and joy. Shirley is survived by her stepchildren, Richard Rusin; Kathy Miller; and Steve Rusin (Mary). She is also survived by her grandchildren, Michael, David Dawe, and Dakota Miller; and her great-grandchildren, Day'Vian Richardson, Kailyn Dawe and Grayson Dawe.

She will be remembered for her humor, her work ethic, her love of gardening and animals, her devotion to family and the unmistakable sound of her golf cart horn echoing through the blueberries.

Her life was one of steady faith, hard work, laughter and deep love.

A funeral will be held at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 1 at Filbrandt Chapel, 1076 S. Bailey, South Haven with Pastor Travis Wilson officiating. Interment will be at Lakeview Cemetery in South Haven.

Those wishing to share a memory of Shirley online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Elaine Shetler

Stephen Shetler and Lara Kizer announce the passing of their mother, Elaine Marie (Retberg) Shetler on Feb. 20 in Leesburg, Va. She fell peacefully asleep after an extended struggle with Alzheimer's.

Her compassion, boundless love and life of service stand as a model for all.

Elaine is survived by son Stephen, daughter Lara, daughter-in-law Julia, son-in-law Robert, grandchildren Veronic and Isabell, three brothers, two sisters and many nieces and nephews.

Gobles man arrested for possession of counterfeit bills

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW — Troopers from the Paw Paw Post recently responded to a forgery/counterfeiting complaint in Pine Grove Township.

According to a news release, two suspects allegedly used counterfeit currency to purchase a designer belt during a Facebook Marketplace meet-up in the 19000 block of 32nd St.

An investigation led to the location and arrest of the suspects at a nearby residence. Approximately $36,400 in counterfeit $100 bills were seized.

An 18-year-old Gobles man was arrested and lodged in the Van Buren County Jail for possession of counterfeit bills, uttering and publishing.

A 20-year-old Plainwell man was arrested and lodged in the Kalamazoo County Jail on an unrelated outstanding warrant.

The names of the suspects were not stated at the time of the release.

"The threat of counterfeit U.S. currency to the financial system continues to evolve," the release stated. "Stay informed about identifying real versus counterfeit bills as advances in technology have made them harder to detect."

The investigation remains ongoing.

If any residents receive counterfeit bills, do not spend them, as passing fake money is a federal crime. Immediately report it to local police or the Secret Service.

To learn more about counterfeit bills, go to secretservice.gov/investigations/counterfeit.

Michigan State Police seek info on Blue Frog Restorations

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW — Troopers from the Michigan State Police Paw Paw Post are seeking to identify individuals who have had contact with anyone claiming to represent Blue Frog Restorations.

According to a news release, anyone throughout Southwest Michigan who have had contact with or entered into agreements with Blue Frog Restorations are encouraged to reach out.

"Representatives of this company allegedly approach victims of storm damage and offer repair services on the condition that the homeowner signs over their insurance check," the release stated.

Any Southwest Michigan residents who have been contacted by this company are urged to immediately discontinue all communication, cancel any agreements or payments and contact D/Sgt. Ben Mahaffie at 269-845-6948.

The South Haven Tribune makes every effort to ensure accuracy in its stories. If you believe there is an error, please contact the editor. If you are unsure who to contact, call 269-637-1104 to be directed to the appropriate editor.

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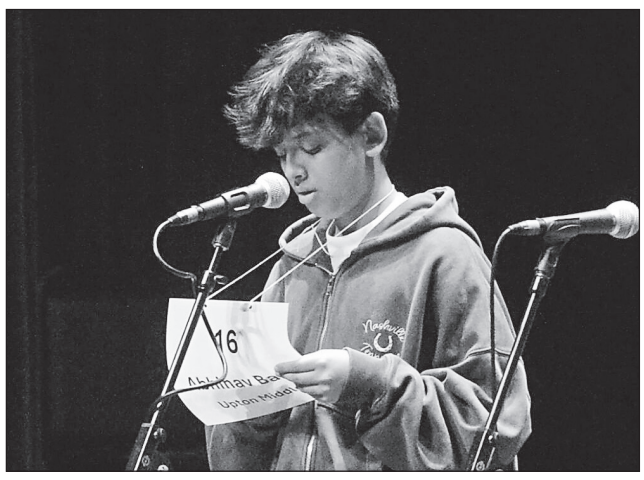
Stars align for spellers

Vetrivel continues Upton's dominance at the Cloverleaf Spelling Bee

By RALPH HEIBUTZKI
Paxton Media Group

Upton Middle School's Sidhanth Vetrivel wins the 2026 Cloverleaf Spelling Bee on Tuesday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.



Photos by Don Campbell / Paxton Media Group

Upton Middle's School's Abhinav Basu finishes in second place during the 2026 Cloverleaf Spelling Bee on Tuesday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

Sylvester Elementary School's Jackson Murmu adjusts a microphone while competing during the 2026 Cloverleaf Spelling Bee on Tuesday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

Upton Middle School's Sidhanth Vetrivel, left, wins the 2026 Cloverleaf Spelling Bee on Tuesday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center. Pratyush Shah finished in third.

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Picking up from previous finishes, Sidhanth Vetrivel will return for his final shot at national glory – after winning the Cloverleaf Spelling Bee on Tuesday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

Sidhanth claimed his title after his Upton Middle School teammate, Abhinav Basu, stumbled on "constellation" – a noun meaning "a group of stars forming a recognizable pattern that is traditionally named after its apparent form."

Under Cloverleaf rules, Sidhanth still had to spell one more word correctly – which turned out to be "exhortation," a noun for "language intended to incite or encourage," according to the definition that pronouncer Dawn Howley read out.

Sidhanth's successful effort followed a brief showdown, in which he and Abhinav spelled four words correctly.

But no matter what word he was trying to spell, Sidhanth approached it the same way, "by just having the prep work done already, so that you already have everything down," he said afterward.

Sidhanth will now represent Southwest Michigan in the Scripps-Howard National Spelling Bee, which runs from May 25-28, at the DAR Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.

Winning the crown will also allow Sidhanth to pick up from previous showings as last year's runner-up; third place finisher, in 2024; and his 2023 win, which earned him a previous trip to Washington, D.C. Students can compete in the program through eighth grade.

Fifty-four students from schools in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties competed for a chance to represent the area in the national competition.

"I feel really good – because I went on top the furthest, and it's been for the second time," he said, flashing a smile Tuesday.

Nothing to chance

Sidhanth, 13, is an eighth-grader at Upton, and the son of Vetrivel Kanagaraj and Dhivya Rupini Ranjeev, of St. Joseph. His major interests including playing soccer for the TKO Club of Kalamazoo, as well as spending time with family and friends.

The road to this year's national contest has followed roughly two hours of studying per day – including roughly 30,000 additional words, apart from the official spelling list, as Ranjeev noted after her son's win.

"We feel excited – all of his hard work for the past three months has paid off. This time, he prepared much more," Ranjeev said. "A lot of sleepless nights, I must say."

Kanagaraj enthusiastically seconded his wife's thoughts, saying, "I'm excited and very happy, because he had put in a lot of effort in. Seeing him happy, that makes me more happy."

For Abhinav, Tuesday's competition marked his second time as Cloverleaf runner-up – where he also finished in 2024. He is the son of Anirban and Suhita Basu, of St. Joseph.

Asked what was going through his mind, Abhinav responded he was trying to work out his best options for correctly spelling the word that turned out to be his last chance.

"'Constellation' – it sounded what it looked like, two L's. I said one L, and when I asked for the language of origin, they said, 'Latin.' If it's Italian, it's two L's, but because it's Latin, it's actually just one."

Like his fellow teammates, Abhinav focused on preparing as thoroughly as possible, with the same mindset – of leaving nothing to chance. "I mean, if you want to get far, you have to study a lot," he said.

The effort that went into his son's final competitive year will serve him well, in whatever he does, Abhinav's father agreed.

"The last seven or eight months, he has been studying sincerely, with total dedication. One thing I love is the way he thinks – he has a strategic mind. Whether it's competitions, or a test, or an exam, he puts in some time to plan it. He's resilient, and refuses to give up," Anirban said.

An unusual finish

Tuesday's competition also marked an unusual finish – with all five finalists being eighth-grade boys, from St. Joseph Public Schools – and a notable sibling element, too, since the Shahs are brothers, Cloverleaf Administrator Tonya Snyder noted.

Snyder couldn't recall the last time such an outcome – or one like it – happened.

However, Tuesday's result is one that definitely proves the unpredictable nature of the event, where anything is possible, she said afterward.

"What's tough is that it's their final chance – so that part's a little bittersweet, because they've been doing this a long time," Snyder said. "Last year also, the top three spellers were (from) Upton – so in the past two years, we've got a little bit of an Upton dynasty starting. We'll see if continues, or not."

Sidhanth and Abhinav's final showdown, coming at about 11:40 a.m., capped seven rounds of competition – which saw spellers starting with relatively simple words, such as "emerald" (a highly prized gemstone, of a rich green color), "eclipse" (an obscuring of the light from one celestial body by the passage of another), and "September" (the ninth month of the year, according to the Gregorian calendar).

The reality of competition

However, it didn't take long for the reality of competition to set in, as the event ramped up to more complex words – from adjectives like "achromatic" (denoting lenses that transmit light without separating it into constituent colors), to adverbs like "contrariwise" (in the opposite way or order), and more esoteric-sounding nouns, such as "bandicoot" (a mainly insectivorous marsupial native to Australia and New Guinea), "stegosaurus" (a small-headed, four-legged dinosaur of the Jurassic and early Cretaceous periods), and "deglaciation" (the disappearance of ice from a previously glaciated region), for example.

As a result of that reality, 17 contestants wound up being eliminated by 9:30 a.m. By the time round three began, 10 more competitors left the stage by 10:08 a.m., followed by an additional 10, at 10:40 a.m.

Most misspellings involved the mingling of similar-sounding words and letters – such as the spelling of "complimentary" (expressing praise) for a different adjective, in "complementary" (combining in such a way as to enhance or emphasize the qualities of each other or another).

The issue forced a 10-minute delay at about 10:30 a.m., so judges Barbara Craig, Britt Dowiat and Katie Krawczak could listen to a recording – to work out which word had been spelled, to decide if the impacted contestant would remain onstage.

In the end, the ruling proved negative, but "we had to play it back, and make sure that the pronouncer said the right word," Snyder said. "Every year, there can be something that can be a little one-off (situation). No year is ever the same."

The Berrien Regional Education Service Agency, Lake Michigan College, Meemic Hagan Insurance Agency, The Herald-Palladium, Honor Credit Union and the D.C. Cook Nuclear Plant served as this year's event sponsors, while Encyclopedia Britannica, Hexco Academic, Merriam-Webster and Michigan Pizza Hut served as co-sponsors.

"We can't do it without the sponsors that help out – it's all of those community organizations coming together, to support an academic event, versus an athletic event, or a music event. So it's a fun way to celebrate a very specific art form," Snyder said.

Top five finishers

Here are the top five finishers of this year's Cloverleaf Spelling Contest, followed by a listing of their prizes:

Grand champion: Sidhanth Vetrivel (Upton Middle School): $2,250 entry fee to the National Spelling Bee (from the D.C. Cook Nuclear Plant, and Herald-Palladium); $2,250 room/tax paid toward the trip to Washington, D.C., and $1,300 prize money (from Cloverleaf Spelling Bee); one-year subscription to News-O-Matic, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary Online Unabridged, Encyclopedia Britannica Online; gift card to access "Nebulous Files" (2026) from Hexco Academic, Texas.

Second: Abhinav Basu (Upton Middle School): $100 cash (Cloverleaf), and "Nebulous Files" access gift card.

Third: Pratyush Shah (Upton Middle School): $80 cash (Cloverleaf), and "Nebulous Files" access gift card.

Fourth: Felix Kovac (Lincoln Elementary School): $60 cash (Cloverleaf).

Fifth: Aarush Shah (Brown Elementary School): $40 cash (Cloverleaf).

The top sixth through fifteenth place finishers also received gift certificates from Michigan Pizza Hut.

All participating contestants received a prize packet from Berrien RESA, Hagan Meemic Insurance, Honor Credit Union and Lake Michigan College.

CAFÉS

From page A1

Rich and Donna Vavra-Musser participate in the Memory Café on Feb. 9 at the Lincoln Township Public Library.

Photos by Ron DeKett / HP correspondent

Michael Alfaro writes a list of words that describes his life as his wife Barbie looks on during a Memory Café on Feb. 9 at the Lincoln Township Public Library. The words will be used to write a song about his life.

Based on past research, Kolbe said music can help a person with dementia to connect with the past by evoking memories, feelings and emotions that they might otherwise find hard to express.

In January, Kolbe introduced a segment she calls "Swinging Through the Stars," which included activities centered around prominent Frank Sinatra songs.

For his song, "New York, New York," everyone spoke about the landmarks of the city that never sleeps. For "Fly Me to the Moon," Kolbe asked participants to do a memory game using space-related images. After listening to "My Way," attendees spoke about how they liked things their way and what they were proud of.

"Participants are meant to build social relationships and friendships at these cafés," Kolbe said. "We want people to experience joy and belonging. Research shows there is an easing of symptoms if it's a recurring activity. This isn't a support group, but more of a social outing where participants can learn about activities and have fun."

An aging population

Christine Vanlandingham, CEO of Region IV Area Agency on Aging, said the introduction of Memory Cafés are only one aspect to how their organization is trying to assist an aging population.

A big goal of the agency is to create opportunities for people with dementia to continue enjoying a social life and hobbies.

"Too often when someone is diagnosed, they're told to go home and 'get your affairs in order' – which is code for step back from living," Vanlandingham said. "Friends might drift away and are not sure how to react. Family members scramble to provide care, feeling overwhelmed and alone. We believe it doesn't have to be this way. In fact, we've seen that it cannot be this way if we want truly healthy, compassionate communities."

As part of their efforts, AAA organizes workshops and trainings to teach neighbors, businesses and first responders about dementia.

She said the idea is to replace myths and fear with empathy and practical tips.

The agency is one of the first in the country to pilot the GUIDE Model – "Guiding an Improved Dementia Experience."

This new approach, which is done through Medicare, adds a dedicated care navigator for families facing dementia.

"Think of it as having a dementia-expert guide on call," Vanlandingham said. "Under GUIDE, our team checks in regularly with each enrolled family, creates a personalized care plan, and is available 24/7 if a crisis comes up or if someone just has a question. It also provides coverage for services Medicare didn't cover before – like caregiver training and respite."

A memorable experience

Memory Cafés have been growing in popularity in the U.S. for a number of years.

The first Alzheimer's Café was launched by Dutch psychologist Bere Miesen in Leiden, Holland, in 1997. Since then, hundreds of people worldwide have contributed their creative and caring abilities to build the Memory Café movement.

The Memory Café Alliance – which was established to increase the number of these cafes in the U.S. – follows in this global tradition of offering hospitable, welcoming spaces in which the challenges of dementia are made more manageable through "community, meaning and moments of joy."

Kolbe said the Memory Cafés were brought to Berrien County to help demonstrate how the affected population can live with dementia.

"Our population is aging and our dementia diagnoses are increasing as well," she said.

In preparation for launching their cafés in Berrien, Kolbe and others at the agency attended a Memory Café in Paw Paw, where participants were visited by preschool students who dressed up in costumes.

Once AAA received the grant in the fall of 2025, Kolbe said they strategically chose the three libraries as a way to reach the majority of Berrien County. To get the word out, AAA has been putting out information on social media and partnering with the libraries.

"We have limited funds and wanted to reach as many people as we could," she said. "We are applying to future grants to expand these cafes to Cass and Van Buren counties."

In the first month, Kolbe said they had a combined 19 participants across the three libraries.

"There are no restrictions for people who come in. If you're over in Van Buren or Indiana, come on over," she said. "We don't ask for a diagnosis at the door, we don't differentiate between caregiver or caregivee. In Niles, we had a family come in with their loved one and had fun as a group of three. It's a shock when a loved one gets a diagnosis. But you still have a lot of life to live meaningfully and purposefully."

Anyone with questions about the Memory Cafés or how to participate, they can reach out to Kolbe by email jesskolbe@areaagencyonaging.org or by calling 269-932-7865.

All Memory Cafés are free and open to the public. Registration is requested in case of inclement weather or illness. For more information, to express interest as a volunteer, or to sign up for a Memory Café, visit areagencyonaging.org/memory-cafes.

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WRECKED?

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0200 EMPLOYMENT

The City of South Haven is seeking a qualified **IT Operations Manager** to oversee daily IT operations and service delivery. Responsibilities include ensuring reliable and secure systems, supervising IT staff, implementing IT Director strategies, and serving as the primary escalation point, including after-hours support. Must have bachelor's degree in information technology, computer science, or a related field. 5 plus years of IT operations and leadership experience with strong knowledge of infrastructure, networking, system administration, and cybersecurity. Experience in compliance, project management, and effective communication required. Candidates may apply online at www.southhavenmi.gov. The City of South Haven is an Equal Opportunity Employer who places a high value on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

0500 MERCHANDISE

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ALL MAKES AND MODELS

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0900 LEGALS

Notice - 2026 Geneva Township Board of Review will meet: Monday, March 9, 2026 9am to 3pm; Thursday, March 12, 20266 pm to 9 pm, Saturday March 14, 9am to Noon. At the Geneva Township Hall, 62127 CR 380, Bangor Appeals by letter or agent to Geneva Township Supervisor, Nancy Ann Whaley, 63133 16th Avenue, Bangor, MI 49013.. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids/services call 269-427-7607

PEOPLE DO READ SMALL ADS!

Sell Your

In The Classifieds!

SOUTH HAVEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP SYNOPSIS
REGULAR MEETING FEBRUARY 11, 2026

PRESENT: Poole, Wiatrowski, Fisher, and Stein
ABSENT: DeGrandchamp, Lewandowski and Bertorelli
Motion to approve January 14, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes.
Allison Berman, a representative from Joey Andrews office gave a report, **Chief Brandon Hinz** gave a report for SHAES. **Chief Adam DeBoer** gave a report for SHPD.
Motion to approve the Agenda.
Graham Welling from Wallick Communities reported for Lighthouse Ridge and will bring the Pilot program before the township board at the next meeting.
Motion to approve Resolution 26-04 to Rezone/PUD Lighthouse Apartments.
Motion to approve the resignation of Jean Stein from the Library Board.
Reports were received. W.C.Askew from the Road Commission was in attendance. Diane Rigozzi reported for Senior Services.
Motion to approve payment of bills in the amount of $214,516.70
Meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.
Respectfully submitted, LaManda Riston, Deputy Supervisor

2026 BOARD OF REVIEW HEARINGS
CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN, MICHIGAN

The City of South Haven 2026 Board of Review will be in session in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, according to the following schedule:

- Tuesday, March 3rd. 9:00 a.m. for Board Organization and review of assessment roll. (No hearing of appeals)
- Tuesday, March 10th. 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon, and 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. hearing of appeals by scheduled appointment. Walk-ins will be seen if time allows between scheduled appointments.
- Thursday, March 12th. 3:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m., hearing of appeals by appointment. Walk-ins will be seen if time allows between scheduled appointments.

Additional sessions may be scheduled by the board if deemed necessary. Appeals may be made by appointment or walk-ins, in person; by an authorized representative; or in writing if received by Thursday, March 12th no later than 5:00 p.m.

Further information may be obtained from the City of South haven Assessor's office, 539 Phoenix St., South Haven, MI 49090 (269) 637-0745.

2026 Van Buren County – City of South Haven

Property Class	Tentative Ratio	Estimated Multiplier
Agricultural	None Classed	None Classed
Commercial	37.84%	1.32135
Industrial	51.14%	0.97771
Residential	47.92%	1.04341
Personal	50.00%	1.00000

2026 Allegan County – City of South Haven

Property Class	Tentative Ratio	Estimated Multiplier
Residential	47.92%	1.04341

THE SOUTH HAVEN CITY HALL IS BARRIER FREE AND THE CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN WILL PROVIDE THE NECESSARY REASONABLE AUXILIARY AIDS AND SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, SUCH AS SIGNERS FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED AND AUDIO TAPES OF PRINTED MATERIALS BEING CONSIDERED AT THE MEETING TO INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES AT THE MEETING UPON SEVEN (7) DAYS NOTICE TO THE SOUTH HAVEN CITY CLERK. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES REQUIRING SERVICES SHOULD CONTACT THE CITY CLERK BY WRITING OR CALL THE SOUTH HAVEN CITY HALL.

CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE PLANNING COMMISSION

On Monday, March 23, 2026, the Planning Commission for the City of South Haven will hear public comments related to the following request(s). The public hearing(s) will be held at 7:00 P.M. at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven concerning the following:

1. Special Land Use Application – 224 Elkenburg Street
Mr. and Mrs. Terry and Tracy Brown have submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 224 Elkenburg St in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-245-008-00.

2. Special Land Use Application – 509 Phoenix Street
Ms. Theresa Nowak has submitted a special land use application to use the third-floor dwelling unit located at 509 Phoenix St in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-770-007-30.

3. Special Land Use Application – 500 Virginia Avenue
Mr. Chris Coble of Blue Water Pools of Grand Rapids, on behalf of the Oak Harbor Condominium Association, has submitted a special land use application to install an inground pool in a waterfront yard at 500 Virginia Ave in the City of South Haven. The parcel for the referenced address is located on the east side of Kentucky Ave, between River Island Dr and Virginia Ave

4. Zoning Map Amendment (Rezoning) Application – 241 Oak Street
Ms. Allison Koetsier has submitted an application to rezone the property located at 241 Oak St in the City of South Haven. The 2.67-acre parcel is currently located in the R-1B Single-Family Residential District. The property owner seeks to rezone the parcel to RM-1 Multiple-Family Residential District. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-885-027-00.

Supporting documentation is available for review at the Building Services office, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090, during normal business hours. Written comments may be submitted in lieu of or in addition to a personal appearance. Written comments must be received no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on Monday, March 23, 2026. Written comments should be addressed to the Planning Commission and must be submitted to the Zoning Administrator at kdissette@southhavenmi.gov or via postal mail addressed to the Planning Commission and sent to 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.

Individuals requesting reasonable accommodation for impairments or disabilities should contact the City Clerk no later than five days prior to the public hearing in person at City Hall, at 269-637-0750, or at mkiker@southhavenmi.gov.

Kelly Getman-Dissette, Zoning Administrator
(269) 637-0760 kdissette@southhavenmi.gov

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH HAVEN
NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE NO. 172

To the residents and property owners of the Charter Township of South Haven, Van Buren County, Michigan, and all other interested persons:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that at its regular meeting on February 11, 2026, the Township Board adopted Ordinance No. 172 entitled "An Ordinance To Amend The South Haven Charter Township Zoning Ordinance And Zoning Map To Establish The Lighthouse Ridge Apartments Planned Unit Development Project And Approve A Planned Unit Development Agreement." The following is a summary of the regulatory effect of the Ordinance. A true copy of the Ordinance is available for inspection or purchase at the Township Hall, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven, Michigan 49090 during regular business hours.

SUMMARY OF ORDINANCE NO. 172

Section 1. Purpose. Section 1 provides the purpose of the Ordinance is to rezone property for a planned unit development of apartments.

Section 2. Legal Description. Section 2 provides the legal description of the rezoned property:

THAT PART OF THE NORTHEAST QUARTER OF SECTION 14, TOWNSHIP 1 SOUTH, RANGE 17 WEST, SOUTH HAVEN TOWNSHIP, VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN, DESCRIBED AS: BEGINNING AT A POINT ON THE NORTH AND SOUTH QUARTER LINE OF SAID SECTION 14 THAT IS 718.58 FEET SOUTH 00°08'30" WEST (DEEDED SOUTH) OF THE NORTH QUARTER OF SAID SECTION 14; THENCE SOUTH 00°08'30" WEST (DEEDED SOUTH) ON SAID NORTH AND SOUTH QUARTER LINE 592.67 FEET; THENCE NORTH 88°52'29" (DEEDED NORTH 89°00'59" WEST) 218.35 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 05°47'02" EAST (DEEDED SOUTH 05°55'32" EAST) 144.46 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 88°52'29" EAST (DEEDED SOUTH 89°00'59") 203.43 FEET TO SAID NORTH AND SOUTH QUARTER LINE; THENCE SOUTH 00°08'30" WEST (DEEDED SOUTH) ON SAID NORTH AND SOUTH QUARTER LINE 66.00 FEET; THENCE NORTH 88°52'29" WEST (DEEDED NORTH 89°00'59" EAST) 129.93 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 44°18'06" WEST (DEEDED SOUTH 04°09'39" WEST) 701.86 FEET TO THE NORTHERLY RIGHT OF WAY LINE OF MICHIGAN HIGHWAY 43; THENCE NORTH 45°01'22" WEST (DEEDED NORTH 54°09'52" WEST) ON SAID NORTHERLY RIGHT OF WAY LINE 162.84 FEET; THENCE NORTH 48°07'46" EAST (DEEDED NORTH 47°59'16" EAST) ON SAID NORTHERLY RIGHT OF WAY LINE 20.00 FEET; THENCE NORTH 44°55'06" WEST (DEEDED NORTH 45°03'36" WEST) ON SAID NORTHERLY RIGHT OF WAY LINE 109.73 FEET TO THE EASTERLY RIGHT OF WAY LINE OF INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 196; THENCE NORTH 20°13'38" EAST (DEEDED NORTH 20°05'08" EAST) ON SAID EASTERLY RIGHT OF WAY LINE 1174.59 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 89°03'38" EAST (DEEDED SOUTH 89°12'08" EAST) 393.81 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING. CONTAINING 13.39 ACRES MORE OR LESS.

Parcel ID numbers 80-17-014-039-30, 80-17-014-039-20, and 80-17-014-039-25.

Section 3. General Provisions. Section 3 states the provisions of Article XVI of the Zoning Ordinance apply to the project.

Section 4. Permitted Use. Section 4 restricts use of the property to a 52-unit apartment complex consisting of two 16-unit buildings, one 20-unit building, an office, a clubhouse, a playground, and parking.

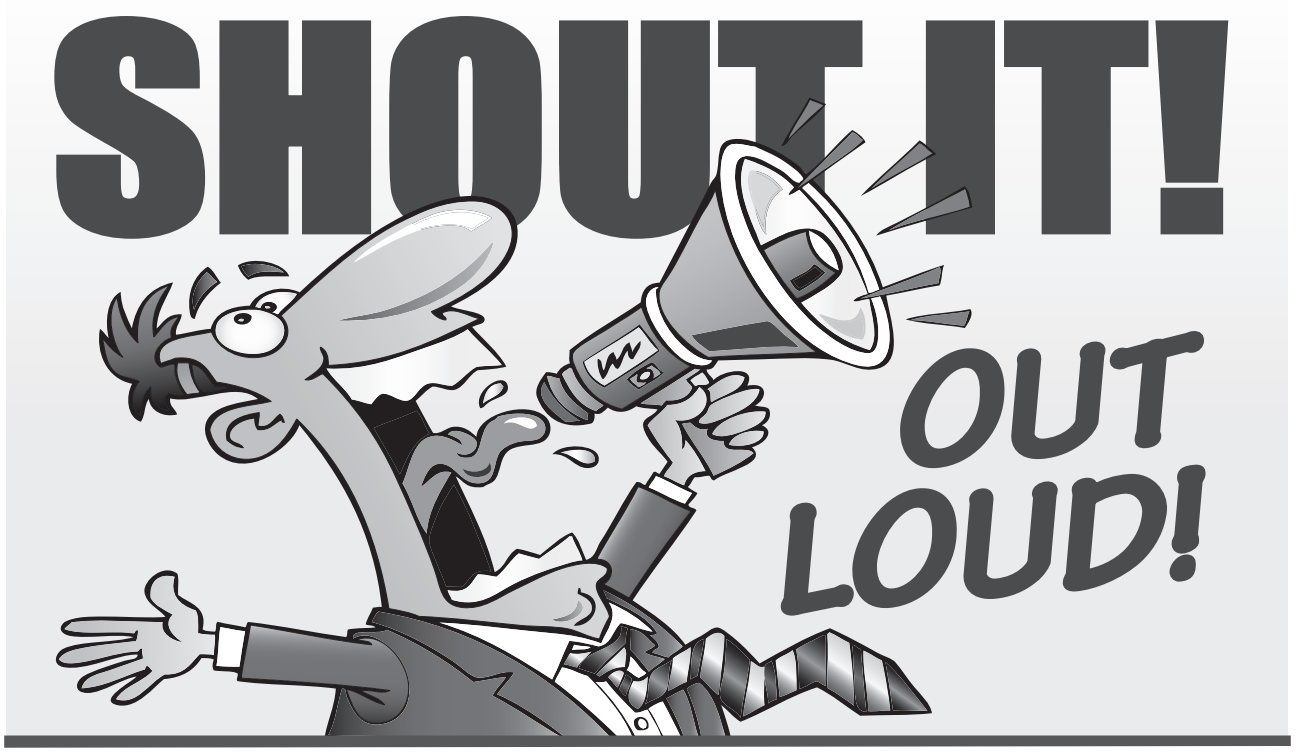
Section 5. Approval Limitations. Section 5 places limitations on the approval of the Project.

Section 6. Validity and Severability. Should any portion of this Ordinance be found invalid for any reason, such holding shall not be construed as affecting the validity of the remaining portions of this Ordinance.

Section 7. Repealer. Any ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this Ordinance are repealed, but only to the extent necessary to give this Ordinance full force and effect.

Section 8. Effective Date. This Ordinance takes effect seven days after publication as provided by law.

SHOUT IT!



IN THE CLASSIFIEDS!

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Best new business nominations open in Cass, Van Buren

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW — Market One recently announced the sixth annual Market One Awards, honoring organizations in Cass and Van Buren counties that are making a meaningful impact on the vitality of our local economy.

According to a news release, Market One is seeking nominations from the public for the Best New Business of the Year awards from Feb. 25 to March 25.

Two awards will be available: one to recognize a business from Cass County and another to recognize a business from Van Buren County.

"Small businesses are the heartbeat of our communities, and the Best New Business Award celebrates the passion and dedication behind them," Market One External Affairs Manager Julia Rose said in the release. "It takes courage and perseverance to start and grow a business, and we're honored to recognize the risk-takers shaping the future of Cass and Van Buren counties."

The Best New Business Award is reserved for businesses that have been in operation for two years or less beginning on Jan. 1, 2026, and produce a product or provide a service in Cass or Van Buren counties.

"A strong candidate will exhibit excellence in some or all of the following: strategic planning, employee development, community involvement and customer service," the release stated.

Nominations for the Best New Business can be made on Market One's website. Nominations will be accepted until 11:59 p.m. on March 25. Self-nominations are both accepted and encouraged.

"The total number of unique, high-quality nominations originating from community members will be considered in selecting the winner," the release stated. "Nominations with identical responses will not be accepted as they will be considered ballot stuffing."

The full set of nomination rules can be found on Market One's website.

Eligible nominees will be invited to continue in the awards process through April 15. The Market One Board of Directors will then select the winners and there will be a ceremony to honor the award winners in June.

Last year, the 2025 Best New Business of the Year award for Van Buren County went to Sly's Seafood & Co. of Paw Paw; and the 2025 Best New Business of the Year award for Cass County went to Lake Effect HVAC Company of Dowagiac.

For questions regarding the Best New Business Awards, contact Julia Rose at RoseJ@MarketOne.org.

ROTARY CLUB OF SOUTH HAVEN CELEBRATES 70 YEARS

Photo provided / Tom Renner

The Rotary Club of South Haven celebrate their 70th anniversary.

The Rotary Club of South Haven recently marked their 70th year of service to the community.

According to a news release, the club was chartered on Feb. 7, 1956 and today the club has 63 active members.

"Supporting projects locally and internationally, the club has the distinction of 100 percent of its membership being financial contributors to Rotary International worldwide projects," the release stated.

In a typical year the club contributes approximately $75,000 to local causes in addition to conducting several service projects.

The Rotary club will host a formal celebration of the 70th anniversary in May.

The club meets every Tuesday.

For more information about the Rotary Club go to southhavenrotary.org.

South Haven chamber launches Give Back Program

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently announced the launch of its new Give Back Program, designed to support and encourage the growth of new businesses in the South Haven area.

According to a news release, this program provides emerging entrepreneurs with access to chamber resources, connections and exposure; helping them establish strong local roots and actively contribute to the South Haven business community.

Through the Give Back Program, one new business each year will receive a free year of chamber membership.

Eligible businesses include those that have been operating for three years or less, have never been a member of the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce and demonstrate a desire to grow and engage with the local business community.

"Recipients will enjoy full membership benefits, including networking opportunities, event participation, marketing exposure and business support," the release stated. "They will also be spotlighted on the chamber's website, social media, and newsletter, recognized at the chamber annual dinner and celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony."

Applications for the program will be reviewed by the Give Back Committee and selection will be based on passion, community spirit and potential for growth.

"The Give Back Program reflects the Chamber's ongoing commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and strengthening our local business community," Executive Director Brandy Key said in the release. "We are thrilled to provide new business owners with the tools, connections and visibility they need to succeed right here in our community."

Applications for the first Give Back Program recipient open March 2. Those interested in applying may access the application online at www.southhavenmi.com or visit the chamber office to pick up an application in person.

U.S. filings for jobless aid rise modestly to 212,000

Layoffs remain at historically healthy levels

By MATT OTT
Associated Press

Nam Y. Huh / AP

Hiring sign is displayed in front of a restaurant in Chicago on Feb. 5.

WASHINGTON — Slightly more Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week as layoffs remain at relatively healthy levels.

The number of Americans filing for jobless aid for the week ending Feb. 21 rose by 4,000 to 212,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's in line with the forecasts of analysts surveyed by the data firm FactSet.

Filings for unemployment benefits are viewed as representative of U.S. layoffs and are close to a real-time indicator of the health of the job market.

Earlier this month, the Labor Department reported that U.S. employers added a surprisingly strong 130,000 jobs in January and the unemployment rate fell to 4.3 percent from 4.4 percent. However, government revisions cut 2024-2025 U.S. payrolls by hundreds of thousands, reducing the number of jobs created last year to just 181,000. That's about one-third of the previously reported 584,000 and the weakest since the pandemic year of 2020.

While weekly layoffs have remained in a historically low range mostly between 200,000 and 250,000 for the past few years, a number of high-profile companies have announced job cuts recently, including UPS, Amazon, Dow and the Washington Post in recent weeks.

The Labor Department also recently reported that job openings fell in December to the lowest level in more than five years.

For now, the U.S. job market appears stuck in what economists call a "low-hire, low-fire" state that has kept the unemployment rate historically low, but has left those out of work struggling to find a new job.

Data over the past year has broadly revealed a labor market in which hiring has clearly slowed, hobbled by uncertainty stoked by President Donald Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of the high interest rates the Fed engineered in 2022 and 2023 to tamp down a spike of pandemic-induced inflation.

Economists are conflicted about whether the stronger-than-expected January job gains are a one-off or possibly the first sign of a recovering labor market, which could lead the Fed to further delay more cuts to its key interest rate.

The government issues it February jobs report next week.

Some Fed officials have specifically argued that last year's weak hiring shows that borrowing costs are weighing on growth and discouraging companies from expanding. A sustained pickup in hiring could undercut that theory.

The Labor Department's report Thursday showed that the four-week moving average of jobless claims, which balances some of the week-to-week volatility, ticked up by 750 to 220,250.

The total number of Americans filing for jobless benefits for the previous week ending Feb. 14 fell by 31,000 to 1.83 million, the government said.

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SWMI housing market sees dip in sales, inventory

By TRIBUNE STAFF

Tony Wittkowski / HP file photo

The Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors is pictured above.

The snowy weather throughout January posed numerous challenges in Southwest Michigan, including dampening the housing market.

According to a report from the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors, the number of houses sold in January fell to 135 houses – the lowest level since 2015.

"The year started with a 14 percent drop in inventory of houses for sale, record-setting selling prices, and a small reduction in the mortgage rate," said Luke Jeffries, association executive of the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors. "In January 2026, the market ended with an inventory of 614 houses for sale, down from 715 houses for sale in January 2025."

Jeffries said Southwest Michigan homebuyers were facing a 3.7-month supply of homes, down slightly from the 3.9-month supply level in January 2025.

The Freddie Mac mortgage rate in January was 6.10, down slightly from the December rate of 6.15, and down from the 6.95 rate in January 2025 for a 30-year conventional mortgage.

The number of houses sold in January 2026 decreased by 22 percent from what was sold in January 2025.

The average selling price in January 2026 changed by less than 1 percent to $418,285 from $416,393 in January 2025. The January 2026 average selling price was 15 percent lower than the $492,373 price in December 2025.

The January 2026 median selling price rose by 1 percent from a year ago, while the median selling price in December 2025 was $295,000.

The total dollar volume with fewer sales fell 22 percent to $56,468,522 from $72,036,007 in January 2025.

There were two bank-owned or foreclosed homes as a percentage of all transactions in January for the Southwest Michigan housing market.

Across the country

According to the National Association of Realtors, existing-home sales decreased by 8.4 percent in January.

The report provides the real estate ecosystem – including agents, homebuyers and sellers – with data on the level of home sales, price and inventory. Month-over-month and year-over-year sales fell in all regions of the country.

"The decrease in sales is disappointing. The below-normal temperatures and above-normal precipitation this January make it harder than usual to assess the underlying driver of the decrease and determine if this month's numbers are an aberration," said NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun. "Affordability conditions are improving, with NAR's Housing Affordability Index showing that housing is the most affordable it's been since March 2022. This is due to wage gains outpacing home price growth and mortgage rates being lower than a year ago. However, supply has not kept pace and remains quite low."

The median existing-home price for all housing types in January was $396,800, up 0.9 percent from one year ago ($393,400) – the 31st consecutive month of year-over-year price increases.

In the Midwest, existing-home sales fell 7.1 percent in sales month over month to an annual rate of 920,000, down 7.1 percent year over year. The median price in the Midwest was $295,400, up 2.3 percent from January 2025.

Total housing inventory at the end of January was down 0.8 percent from December and up 3.4 percent from January 2025. Unsold inventory sits at a 3.7-month supply at the current level up from 3.5 months in December and one year ago.

"Due to low supply, the median home price reached a new high for the month of January," Yun said. "Homeowners are in a financially comfortable position as a result. Since January 2020, a typical homeowner would have accumulated $130,500 in housing wealth."

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

March

3 – Scott Club: Remembering Remarkable Michigan Women at 1 p.m. at First Congregational Church. Attendees are encouraged to wear their own hats in celebration of women's history month.

6 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-Doh Play Date free event for preschoolers at 11 a.m.

11 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

12 – South Haven Indivisible: Book discussion on "The Flag and the Cross" from 4 to 5 p.m. at the South Haven Memorial Library.

12 – South Haven Area Young Professionals: Monthly networking event from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at South Haven Brewpub

17 – Scott Club: Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with music, Celtics and classics at 1 p.m. at Senior Services.

18 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: DIY at the library event to learn how to make homemade sugar scrubs at 4 p.m.

19 – Baseball: Boys Junior Varsity against Michigan Lutheran High School at 4 p.m.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon. Wear clothes that can get messy.

21 – South Haven Memorial Library: Free STEM Saturdays event with legos and other rotating STEM activities from 11 a.m. to noon.

23 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity against Three Rivers High School at 4 p.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Friends of the South Haven library meeting from 2 to 3 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

25 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity against Berrien Springs High School at 4 p.m.

25 – South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce: South Haven High School summer job fair.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafes from 11 a.m. to noon. Snacks and engaging conversation about self-care, support and community resources. Free event. Kids can enjoy Stuffed Animal Story Time with the library staff during the event.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

Al-Van Humane Society

Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate

73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Oreo!

Oreo is a 3-year-old sweetheart who loves lounging in cozy beds and cat trees. She can be a little shy with new people, but once she feels safe, she absolutely adores head scratchies and belly rubs. Oreo is calicivirus positive and would do best as the only cat in the home or with other calici-positive feline friends. To submit an adoption survey, visit al-van.org/adopt.

Humane Education Day @ Michigan Maritime Museum Join Al-Van Humane Society and the Michigan Maritime Museum for a fun, hands-on afternoon all about animals and community. Humane Education Day is a drop-in program designed for kids and families to learn what a humane society does, how to safely and respectfully interact with animals, and why enrichment plays such an important role in animal welfare. on-site adoptions will be available for those who find their perfect match.

This free, drop-in event runs from 12:00–3:00 PM, so families are welcome to stop by anytime during the program.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST

Wet dog food, poop bags, and toilet paper

The South Haven Tribune makes every effort to ensure accuracy in its stories.

If you believe there is an error, please contact the editor of the page on which it occurred. If you are unsure who to contact, call 269-637-1104 to be directed to the appropriate editor.

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The Spotlight

A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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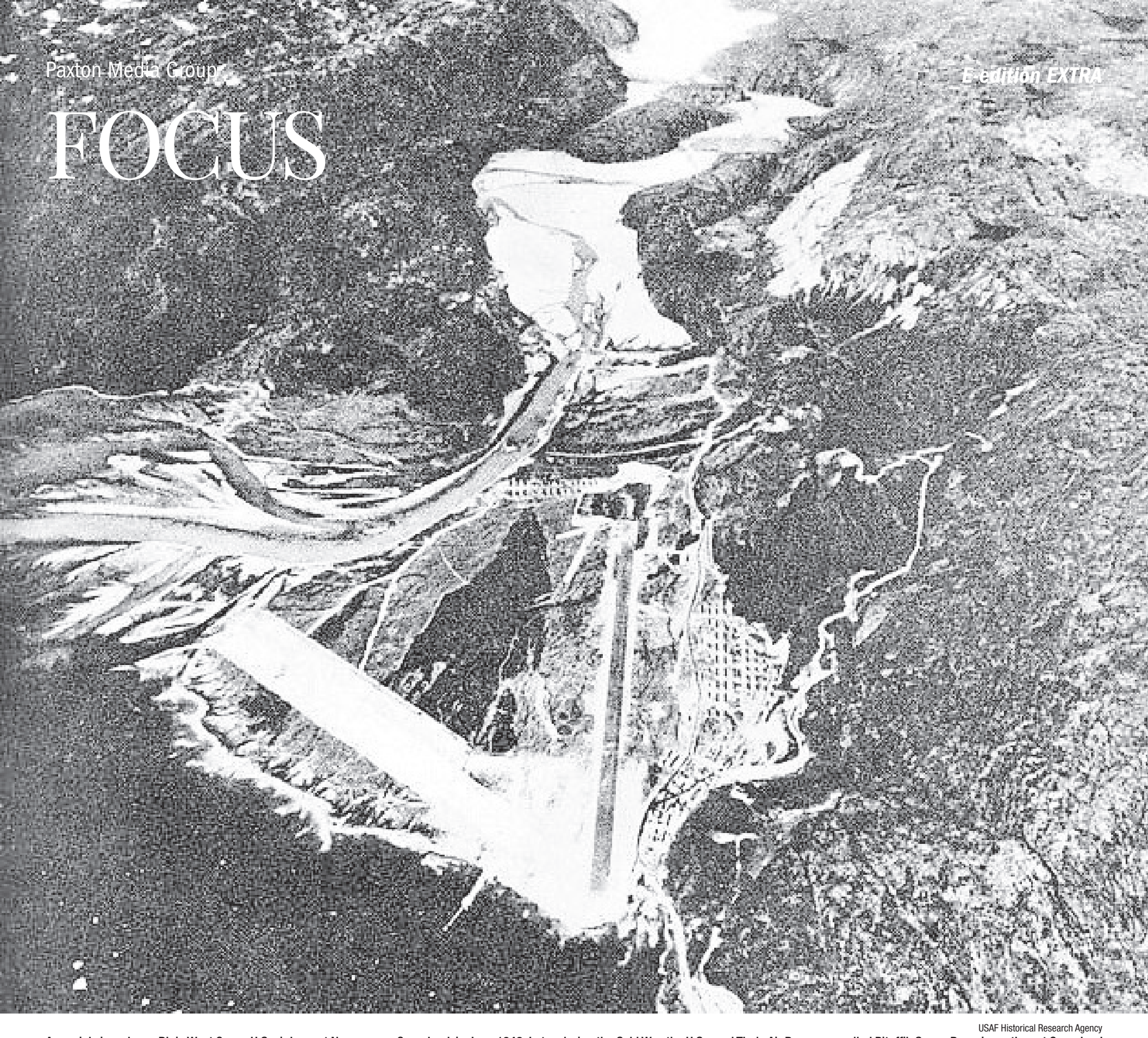

USAF Historical Research Agency

An aerial view shows Bluie West One, a U.S. air base at Narsarsuaq, Greenland, in June 1942. Later, during the Cold War, the U.S. used Thule Air Base, now called Pituffik Space Base, in northwest Greenland as a key missile defense site because of its proximity to the USSR.

In World War II's dog-eat-dog struggle for resources, a Greenland mine launched a new world order

By THOMAS ROBERTSON
Visiting Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, Macalester College (The Conversation)

On April 9, 1940, Nazi tanks stormed into Denmark. A month later, they blitzed into Belgium, Holland and France. As Americans grew increasingly rattled by the spreading threat, a surprising place became crucial to U.S. national security: the vast, ice-capped island of Greenland.

The island, a colony of Denmark's at the time, was rich in mineral resources. The Nazi invasions left it and several other European colonies as international orphans.

Greenland was essential for air bases as U.S. planes flew to Europe, and also for strategic minerals. Greenland's Ivittuut (formerly Ivigtut) mine contained the world's only reliable supply of the most important material you've probably never heard of: cryolite, a frosty white mineral that the U.S. and Canadian industries relied upon to refine bauxite into aluminum, and thus essential to assembling a modern air force.

A month after the Nazis seized Denmark, five American Coast Guard cutters set sail for Greenland, in part to protect the Ivittuut mine from the Nazis.

People sometimes forget that World War II was a dog-eat-dog struggle for resources – oil and uranium but also dozens of other materials, everything from rubber to copper. Without these strategic materials, no modern military could produce crucial new weapons such as tanks and airplanes. The resource struggle often started before actual fighting.

Foreign materials fueled American global power, but also raised tricky questions about access to resources and about sovereignty, just as the old European imperial order was being rethought. As in 2026, U.S. presidents had to skillfully balance force and diplomacy.

As a historian at Macalester College, I research how Americans shape environments around the world through their purchasing and national security needs, and how foreign landscapes enable and constrain American actions. Today, control of Greenland's natural resources is again on an American president's radar as demand for critical minerals rises and supply tightens.

During the spring of 1940, America and its European allies mapped out patterns of resource use and ideas of global interconnection that would shape the international order for decades. Greenland helped give birth to this new order.

Rethinking American vulnerability

On May 16, 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt addressed a joint session of Congress, including many "American first" isolationists wary of European entanglements. Roosevelt implored Americans to wake up to new threats in the world – to, in his words, "recast their thinking about national protection."

New weapons, he warned, had shrunk the world, and oceans could no longer shield the United States. The nation's fate was inextricably tied to Europe's. Nothing showed this better than Greenland: "From the fiords of Greenland," FDR warned, "it is four hours by air to Newfoundland; five hours to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and to the province of Quebec; and only six hours to New England."

But Greenland set off alarm bells for another reason. To protect itself in a dangerous world, Roosevelt famously called for the U.S. to hammer out 50,000 planes a year. But in 1938, America had produced only 1,800 planes.

To meet this ambitious goal, Roosevelt and his advisers knew that little could be done without Greenland. No Greenland, no cryolite. No cryolite, no massive American air force. Without cryolite, making 50,000 planes would be infinitely more difficult.

The age of alloys

Americans, National Geographic explained in 1942, lived in an "age of alloys." Without aluminum alloys and other metallic mixtures, assembly lines churning out modern tanks, trucks and airplanes would grind to a halt. "More than any other struggle in history, this is a war of many metals, and the lack of a single one may be a blow far worse than the loss of a battle."

Few materials mattered more than aluminum. Light yet strong, aluminum formed 60 percent of a heavy bomber's engines, 90 percent of its wings and fuselage, and all of its propellers.

But there was a problem: Refining aluminum from bauxite ore required working with dangerously hot metallic mixtures, over 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit (1,100 degrees Celsius). Cryolite solved the problem by reducing the temperature to a more manageable 900 F (480 C).

The Nazis' chemical industry had found a substitute for cryolite using fluorspar, but the U.S. preferred the more resource-efficient cryolite and wanted to prevent the Germans from having it.

After the Nazis seized Denmark

Just days after German tanks rolled into Denmark in April 1940, Allied officials huddled to devise ways to protect Ivittuut's magical mineral. On May 3, Danish Ambassador to the U.S. Henrik de Kauffmann, risking trial for treason, requested American assistance. On May 10, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Comanche departed New England for Ivittuut. Four others soon followed, one with guns for the mine's defenders.

That very week in Washington, at a meeting of the Pan American Union, Roosevelt and his advisers spoke with hundreds of geologists and other representatives from Latin America – a resource-rich region that the U.S. saw as an answer to its strategic materials shortages.

Nervous about the history of U.S. imperial high-handedness in the region, some Latin Americans thought that their countries should seal off their resources to outside control, as Mexico had in nationalizing U.S. and European oil holdings in 1938.

With European empires crumbling, Roosevelt faced a delicate diplomatic dance with Greenland. He wanted to maintain the appearance of neutrality, keep skeptical isolationists in Congress from revolting and give no provocations to Latin American anti-imperialists to cut off resources. Crucially, he also needed to avoid giving the resource-starved Japanese a legal justification to seize the oil-rich Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia – another European colony orphaned by the Nazi invasion.

Roosevelt's solution: enlist Coast Guard "volunteers" to guard Ivittuut. By the end of the summer, long before the U.S. officially entered the war, 15 sailors resigned from their ships and took up residence near the mine.

Seeing Greenland as crucial to U.S. security

Roosevelt also got creative with geography.

In an April 12, 1940, press conference, just days after the Nazi invasion, he began to emphasize Greenland as part of the Western Hemisphere, more American than European, and thus falling under Monroe Doctrine protections. To calm fears in Latin America, U.S. officials recast the doctrine as development-oriented hemispheric solidarity.

Maj. William S. Culbertson, a former U.S. trade official speaking before the Army Industrial College in fall 1940, noted how the scramble for resources pulled the U.S. into a form of nonmilitary warfare: "We are engaged at the present time in economic warfare with the totalitarian powers. Publicly, our politicians don't state it quite as bluntly as that, but it is a fact." For the rest of the century, the front line was just as likely a far-off mine as an actual battlefield.

On April 9, 1941, exactly a year after the Nazis seized Denmark, Kauffmann met with U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull to sign an agreement "on behalf of the King of Denmark" placing Greenland and its mines under the U.S. security blanket. At Narsarsuaq, on the island's southern tip, the U.S. began constructing an airbase named "Bluie West One."

During the rest of World War II and throughout the Cold War, Greenland would house several important U.S. military installations, including some that forced Inuit families to relocate.

Critical minerals today

What transpired in Greenland in the 18 months before Pearl Harbor fit into a larger emerging pattern.

As the U.S. ascended to global leadership and realized that it couldn't maintain military dominance without wide access to foreign materials, it began to redesign the global system of resource flows and the rules for this new international order.

It rejected the Axis' "might makes right" territorial conquest for resources, but found other ways to guarantee American access to critical resources, including loosening trade restrictions in European colonies.

The U.S. provided a lifeline to the British with the destroyers-for-bases deal in September 1940 and the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, but it also gained strategic military bases around the world. It used aid as leverage to also pry open the British Empire's markets.

The result was a postwar world interconnected by trade and low tariffs, but also a global network of U.S. bases and alliances of sometimes questionable legitimacy designed in part to protect U.S. access to strategic resources.

During the Cold War, these global resources helped defeat the Soviet Union. However, these security imperatives also gave the U.S. license for support of authoritarian regimes in places like Iran, Congo and Indonesia.

America's voracious appetite for resources also often displaced local populations and Indigenous communities, justified by the old claim that they misused the resources around them. It left environmental damage from the Arctic to the Amazon.

Strategic resources have been at the center of the American-led global system for decades. But U.S. actions today are different. The cryolite mine was a working mine, rarer than today's proposed critical mineral mines in Greenland, and the Nazi threat was imminent. Most important, Roosevelt knew how to gain what the U.S. needed without a "damn-what-the world-thinks" military takeover.

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FOCUS

Talaj / Getty Images

'Which Side Are You On?'

American protest songs have emboldened social movements for generations, from coal country to Minneapolis

By TED OLSON
Professor of Appalachian Studies and Bluegrass, Old-Time and Roots Music Studies, East Tennessee Sta (The Conversation)

The presence of Department of Homeland Security agents in Minnesota compelled many people there to use songs as a means of protest. Those songs were from secular as well as religious traditions.

On Jan. 8, 2026, the day after Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Jonathan Ross killed Minneapolis resident Renée Good on Portland Avenue, an anonymous post appeared on Reddit that featured an uncredited text clearly adapted from the lyrics of a Depression-era protest song from Appalachia, "Which Side Are You On?" The Reddit text criticized the recent federal presence in Minnesota and implored Minnesotans to take a stand.

In our town of Minneapolis, There's no neutrals here at home. You're either marching in the streets or you kill for Kristi Noem Which side are you on, Oh which side are you on? Which side are you on, Oh which side are you on? ICE is a bunch of killers who hide behind a mask. How do they get away with this? That's what you have to ask. Which side are you on …

For centuries, songs have served as vehicles for expressing community responses to sociopolitical crises, whether government repression or corporate exploitation. "Which Side Are You On?" resonated with Minnesotans, in part because it has been recorded by numerous artists over the decades.

The song dates back to another societal struggle that occurred in another part of the United States during another crisis moment in American history. "Which Side Are You On?" has consoled and empowered countless people for generations during struggles in red as well as blue states. It has also inspired people to write new protest songs in the face of new crises.

Birth of a protest anthem

"Which Side Are You On?" was composed in 1931, a woman's spontaneous response to a coal company's effort to prevent miners in Harlan County, Kentucky, from joining the United Mine Workers of America. Those miners hoped the labor union would improve their working conditions and overturn imposed reductions to their wages.

In support of the coal company, sheriff J. H. Blair and armed deputies broke into the house of union organizer Sam Reece to apprehend him and locate evidence of union activity. Reece was in hiding elsewhere, but his wife, Florence, and their children were present. After ransacking the house, the sheriff and deputies left.

Florence tore a page out of a calendar and jotted down lyrics for an impromptu song, which she recalled setting to the melody of a Baptist hymn "I'm gonna land on the shore." Others have observed that the melody in Florence's song was similar to that of the traditional British ballad "Jack Monroe," which features the haunting refrain "Lay the Lily Low."

"Which Side Are You On?" channeled Florence's reaction to that traumatic experience. Throughout the 1930s, she and others sang the song during labor strikes in the Appalachian coalfields, and the lyrics were included in union songbooks. Then, in 1941, the Almanac Singers, a folk supergroup featuring Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, recorded the song, and it reached many people beyond Appalachia.

Since then, a range of musicians – including Charlie Byrd; Peter, Paul and Mary; the Dropkick Murphys; Natalie Merchant; Ani DiFranco; and the Kronos Quartet – performed "Which Side Are You On?" in concert settings and for recordings. A solo live performance with a concert audience joining the chorus was a focal point of Seeger's "Greatest Hits" album in 1967.

The Academy Award-winning documentary film "Harlan County U.S.A." (1976) included a clip of Florence Reece singing her song during a 1973 strike. "Which Side Are You On?" was translated into other languages – a testament to its universal theme of encouraging solidarity to people confronting authoritarian power.

Protest songs of the modern era

While the American protest song tradition can be traced back to the origins of the nation, "Which Side Are You On?" served as a prototype for the modern-era protest song because of its lyrical directness. Many memorable, risk-taking protest songs were composed in the wake of, and in the spirit of, "Which Side Are You On?"

Noteworthy are numerous protest classics in the folk vein, epitomized by a sizable part of Guthrie's repertoire, by early Bob Dylan songs like "Masters of War" (1963), "The Times They Are a-Changin'" (1964) and "Only A Pawn in Their Game" (1964), and by Phil Ochs' mid-1960s songs of political critique, such as "Here's to the State of Mississippi" (1965).

But protest songs have hailed from all music genres. Rock and rhythm and blues, for instance, have spawned many iconic recordings of protest music: Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1964), Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" (1966), Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" (1969), Edwin Starr's "War" (1970) and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's "Ohio" (1970) among many others.

Blues, country, reggae and hip-hop have spawned broadly inspirational protest songs, and jazz too has yielded classic protest recordings, such as Abel Meeropol's "Strange Fruit" (1939), popularized by Billie Holiday, and Gil Scott-Heron's 1971 recording of the jazz-poem "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised."

Indeed, there are so many enduring contributions to the American protest song canon that a list like Rolling Stone's recent "100 Best Protest Songs of All Time" is only the tip of the iceberg. Regardless of the genre, effective protest songs retain their power to move and motivate people today despite having been composed in response to past situations or circumstances. And protest songs from the past are often adapted to help people more effectively respond to the crisis of the moment.

Songs for this moment

"Which Side Are You On?" was sung – and its theme invoked – in Minnesota throughout January 2026. On Jan. 24, shortly after Border Patrol agents killed Alex Pretti on Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey referred to the song's title during a public address to his constituents: "Stand up for America. Recognize that your children will ask you what side you were on." That same day, the grassroots organization 50501: Minnesota posted online an appeal to those in power: "[E]very politician and person in uniform must ask themselves one question – which side are you on?"

The next day, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz acknowledged divisions in the U.S. during a televised briefing, urging citizens in his state and across the nation to consider the choice before them: "I've got a question for all of you. What side do you want to be on?"

People protesting ICE and Customs and Border Protection actions in Minnesota and elsewhere have been singing "Which Side Are You On?" and other well-known protest songs, but musicians have also been writing new protest songs about the crisis. On Jan. 8, the Dropkick Murphys posted on social media a clip of "Citizen I.C.E.," a revamped version of the group's 2005 song "Citizen C.I.A.," augmented by video of the Jan. 7 fatal shooting of Renée Good. On Jan. 27, British musician Billy Bragg released "City of Heroes," which he composed in tribute to the Minneapolis protesters.

Following suit was Bruce Springsteen, a longtime champion of the protest song legacy. On Jan. 28, Springsteen released online his newly composed and recorded "Streets of Minneapolis." Millions of people around the world heard the song and saw its accompanying video.

On Jan. 30, Springsteen made a surprise appearance at the Minneapolis club First Avenue, performing his new song at the "Defend Minnesota" benefit concert, organized by musician Tom Morello to raise funds for the families of Good and Pretti.

Making a difference

On the day Pretti was shot dead, hundreds of Minneapolis protesters attended a special service at Minneapolis' Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church. Pastor Elizabeth MacAuley, in a televised interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper, reflected on the role of song in helping people cope: "It's been a time when it is pretty tempting to feel so disempowered. … [T]he singing resistance movement … brought out the hope and the grief and the rage and the beauty."

Cooper asked: "Do you think song makes a difference?" MacAuley replied: "I know song makes a difference."

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Photos by Tyger Williams / The Philadelphia Inquirer / TNS

Hanna Williams, co-owner of Friday Saturday Sunday, and Gene Gualtieri, a regular at the restaurant, pose with Lego action figures of themselves created by Gene's son Leo.

A restaurant regular's devotion inspired his son to build a $1,500 Lego replica

By BEATRICE FORMAN
The Philadelphia Inquirer (TNS)

A custom Lego model of restaurant Friday Saturday Sunday built by Leo Gualtieri. It features action figures of co-owners Chad and Hanna Williams.

A figurine of bartender Paul MacDonald shows off a Lego version of his Fibonacci sequence wheel to a miniature of Gene Gualtieri inside a Friday Saturday Sunday replica his son built out of Legos.

PHILADELPHIA — To be loved is to be known – or, better yet, to inspire a 3,233-piece custom Lego set.

Gene Gualtieri is devoted to Friday Saturday Sunday. Almost every Friday since 2022, the Filter Square resident has lined up at 4:30 p.m. to score the same seat at the first-floor bar of Chad and Hanna Williams' acclaimed Rittenhouse Square restaurant, where he is known to house a full roast chicken – bones and all – and order off-menu sherry martinis from bartender Paul MacDonald. It's a ritual that has inspired a tattoo on Gualtieri's bicep: "B9," code for bar seat no. 9.

"It's my seat," said Gualtieri, 57, an engineer. "This feeling of hospitality and being welcomed [at the bar] ... it's a social hub for me."

So when Gualtieri's 21-year-old son, Leo, needed a Christmas present for his father, everyone from his aunt Claire to his older brother Sam had the same idea. What if, Leo recounts them wondering, there was a way to shrink Friday Saturday Sunday so it fits in your house?

The resulting gift – a 1½-foot-tall replica of Friday Saturday Sunday's facade and its ground-level Lovers Bar, constructed out of more than 3,200 Legos – doesn't skimp on the details. Leo recreated everything, down to the discolored patches of sidewalk out front.

Friday Saturday Sunday (Leo's version) comes with Lego figurines of the Williamses, bartender MacDonald, and his father that can be posed to sit in one of the bar's 13 tiger-print chairs. There's a petite version of the Fibonacci carousel MacDonald uses to perfect his mixology, plus miniatures of the bar's gargoyle- and raven-shaped pour spouts, mermaid caryatids, and towering citrus bowls. In honor of restaurant's Michelin star, Leo even included a tiny and perfectly rotund Michelin Man.

Leo stored the pieces in a repurposed Seinfeld Lego set box that he wrapped in a rendering of the finished design. When Gualtieri opened it on Christmas morning, he cried. The finished version inspired a similar response from others after Gualtieri and the restaurant posted photos on Instagram at the end of January.

"This is so beautiful I wanna cry," commented one person. "Top 10 most impressive things I have ever seen," wrote another.

Leo's dad concurs. "I was pretty blown away," Gualtierri said. "At first glance, it looks like a Lego set you'd get a store."

A replica built brick by (plastic) brick

Recreating Friday Saturday Sunday was a labor of love for Leo, a self-described former Lego kid currently finishing up his senior year at Emerson College as a comedy major. As a child, Leo was fixated on building an ever-expanding amusement park out of the plastic blocks alongside his dad. It was an obsession that served him well this holiday season.

To reconstruct the restaurant, Leo first had to create a rendering of the bar and its exterior in Brick Link, Minecraft-esque software that lets users build and source their own custom Lego sets. Leo said he spent roughly 100 hours translating all the tiny details into Lego form, working first off images of the facade from Google. When those weren't precise enough, he said, Leo begged MacDonald to send him photos of all the minutiae, from the glassware to close-ups of the light fixtures.

"It was addicting ... I would work on it in class," said Leo while on Zoom with his father, who scoffed at the admission. "Time would pass much faster because I was locked in."

Once the rendering was complete, Leo and his mom spent $1,500 on the Lego pieces, sourced from 13 different Lego resellers across Japan, Spain, and the Netherlands. To find a realistic version of Chad Williams' beard and apron, Leo had to commission custom blocks from an Etsy seller.

After Christmas, Leo spent the remainder of his winter break from college building mini Friday Saturday Sunday, developing calluses from clicking the bricks into place. Dad, Leo said, wasn't much help.

"He tried to build some chairs," Leo said of his father. "I don't think he's cut out for it." (Gualtieri agreed. Leo, he admitted, gets his dexterity from his mother.)

Every time he looks at the replica, Gualtieri said he discovers new details, like how the bottles mimic the exact ones behind MacDonald's bar. Hanna Williams, Friday Saturday Sunday's co-owner, felt the same when Gualtieri sent her progress updates on the buildout.

"I think [Leo] might know every inch of the bar better than me," she said. Williams especially loves her Lego doppelgangër: "A high bun, bangs, and tattoos? That's so me."

Williams is used to her restaurant being the recipient of the highest order of affection. In the decade since she and her husband revamped Friday Saturday Sunday from a classic fine-dining restaurant with excellent mushroom soup into cozy bar for walk-ins with a top-floor tasting menu that melds Caribbean, Asian, and soul food influences, the restaurant has earned a Michelin Star, a James Beard Award, and a spot on the World's 50 Best North American restaurants. Just last week, Friday Saturday Sunday won an award for excellence in hospitality from the Tasties, Philly's homegrown culinary honors.

And yet, Williams said, the Lego replica represents an extra-special type of achievement.

"It's completely overwhelming," she said. "But at the same time, there's nothing that could make you feel better."

HEALTH

Dreamstime / TNS

Heart disease affects women differently than men, and understanding those differences can be lifesaving.

Heart disease in women

Four things a Mayo Clinic cardiologist wants to share

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

Heart disease affects women differently than men, and understanding those differences can be lifesaving. Dr. Sharonne N. Hayes, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist and leading expert in the field of women's heart health, says progress in research, treatment and prevention has accelerated but women still need better information.

Here are four things Dr. Hayes wants women to know, and do, when it comes to protecting their heart health.

1 Women get heart disease, and symptoms can be missed

Dr. Hayes says there are conditions that disproportionately affect women including heart failure with preserved ejection fraction, microvascular dysfunction and heart attacks due to spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD). As a result, women with chest pain or shortness of breath were sometimes told their hearts were fine, only to learn later they did have heart disease.

Women were also historically excluded from clinical trials, meaning researchers are still closing evidence gaps today. Dr. Hayes says women should trust their symptoms and continue advocating for answers when something does not feel right.

2 Knowledge and advocacy can change outcomes

One of the most encouraging changes Dr. Hayes has seen is the rise of patient advocacy and access to health information. Women are more engaged, more informed and more willing to ask questions.

That shift is especially visible through advocacy organizations such as WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease. Women may arrive at the point of care frightened and unsure how to describe their symptoms, or they may feel alone in dealing with their diagnosis. Education, training and peer support can give them tools to feel more confident and empowered.

Dr. Hayes describes the transformation as powerful, driven by knowledge and by the support women find in one another.

3 The future of heart care is promising

Advances in cardiology are moving quickly. Dr. Hayes says treatments that once required open-heart surgery may now be replaced by less invasive procedures, and emerging therapies offer hope that future outcomes may differ from those of past generations.

Study design is important. Representation in research, including artificial intelligence, can influence how findings apply. Dr. Hayes notes the role of patient data breadth in the development of new tools.

4 Prevention starts with habits and partnership

Dr. Hayes emphasizes that it is never too early or too late to improve heart health. Healthy habits adopted in childhood reduce future risk, and starting an exercise program later in life still improves heart health.

She says prevention comes down to three things: behaviors, choices and knowledge. Staying physically active, avoiding tobacco, and eating a heart-healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fewer processed foods all matter. Knowing personal health numbers, such as blood pressure and cholesterol, and understanding family history are also critical.

Equally important is working closely with a health care team. Medications should never be stopped without consulting a health care professional. If a treatment causes side effects or is not working, there are often other options, says Dr. Hayes, emphasizing the importance of patience and care teams working together to find solutions.

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

What to know about pregnancy and heart valve disease

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I found out during my pregnancy that I have mitral valve stenosis. How common is valve disease, and what should I know about it?

ANSWER: Valve disease affects how blood moves through the heart, and pregnancy is often a time when symptoms first appear or become more noticeable. Learning about a heart valve condition during pregnancy can be unexpected and overwhelming. Understanding why this happens and exploring treatment options can bring clarity and calm fears.

Pregnancy is often described as the body's ultimate cardiovascular stress test. The heart works significantly harder to support both the mother and the developing baby. Blood volume expands, vascular resistance drops and heart rate increases. These normal physiological changes begin early in pregnancy and peak in the late second to early third trimester.

These changes can unmask symptoms of previously silent valve disease or intensify those of known valve conditions because the heart is being asked to move more blood through a valve that isn't functioning normally. Known valve conditions include:

- Narrowed valves (stenosis)
- Leaky valves (regurgitation)
- Congenital valve abnormalities

Other valve conditions may result from infections, such as rheumatic fever, or changes in the valve's structure over time.

Symptoms

Even women who felt well before pregnancy may begin to notice symptoms around 28 to 30 weeks, when the cardiovascular system reaches its peak workload.

Many common pregnancy symptoms overlap with those of valve disease. Fatigue, shortness of breath, swelling and a faster heart rate can all occur in a healthy pregnancy. It's especially important to evaluate symptoms that begin suddenly or noticeably worsen.

Shortness of breath with activity or when lying flat, unusual fatigue that affects daily routines, swelling in the legs or feet, racing heartbeat, reduced exercise tolerance, or chest pressure should prompt a conversation with a clinician.

Because pregnancy symptoms can mask underlying cardiac issues, clear communication between patients and their care teams is essential. Many patients assume new symptoms are simply part of pregnancy, especially if previous pregnancies were uncomplicated. But when something feels off, listening to that instinct is important.

An assessment of symptoms may include:

- Physical exam
- Echocardiogram to look at the heart's structure and function
- Electrocardiogram (ECG) to check the heart's rhythm
- Additional imaging or testing

These evaluations help determine whether symptoms are pregnancy-related or caused by cardiac disease.

Treatment

Once valve disease is identified, coordinated care becomes especially important. Many patients benefit from a pregnancy heart team approach that includes specialists in cardiology and maternal-fetal medicine, with support from cardiac surgery or structural heart experts, if needed. Local obstetric teams may remain involved, particularly if delivery is expected to happen closer to home.

The pregnancy heart team approach helps align medical needs with a patient's goals for pregnancy and family planning. Shared decision-making plays a central role. Every situation is different, and treatment choices are shaped by personal values, risk considerations and long-term planning.

Treatment depends on the severity of the condition and how well a patient tolerates the physiologic demands of pregnancy.

Many women with mild or moderate valve disease can continue pregnancy safely with close monitoring. Medications may be used to help manage fluid retention, control heart rate or reduce symptoms.

When valve disease is more severe or symptoms significantly affect daily life, procedures may be done before or during pregnancy. These include:

- Catheter-based procedures to widen a narrow valve or improve function
- Valve repair to preserve a person's own valve when possible
- Valve replacement when the disease is advanced or symptoms can't be controlled

For those who need valve replacement, care teams will discuss the choice between a mechanical or tissue valve, especially for women planning future pregnancies.

- Mechanical valves are durable but require lifelong anticoagulation, which can add complexity during pregnancy.
- Tissue valves typically avoid long-term blood thinners but have a shorter lifespan.

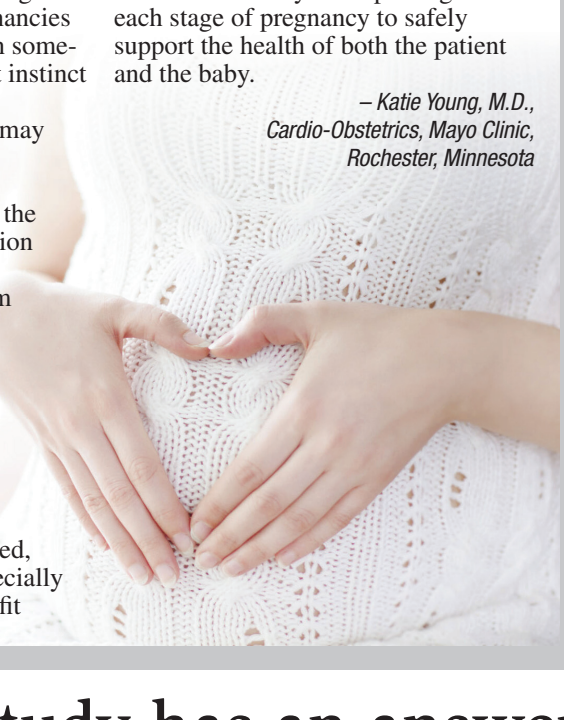
Treatment choices can shape both personal health and a family's future. Clear, collaborative discussions about risks and benefits support confident decision-making.

Expert teams across cardiology, maternal-fetal medicine, imaging and surgery help form a comprehensive plan tailored to each patient's needs.

Any expectant mother should reach out to a clinician if symptoms such as shortness of breath, difficulty breathing when lying flat, chest discomfort, palpitations, swelling that increases rapidly or new fatigue begin to interfere with daily life.

When something doesn't feel right, speaking up is one of the most important steps a patient can take. A strong care team is ready to help navigate each stage of pregnancy to safely support the health of both the patient and the baby.

– Katie Young, M.D., Cardio-Obstetrics, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota



How bad is junk food for your heart? A new study has an answer

By CHRISTOPHER O'DONNELL
Tampa Bay Times (TNS)

Nina Firsova / Dreamstime / TNS

Junk food has been linked to higher risks of diabetes and hypertension.

Junk food like sodas, potato chips, packaged snacks and processed meats has long been linked to higher risks of diabetes and hypertension.

Now, an increasing body of research is also tying ultra-processed foods to cardiovascular disease.

The latest is a study by researchers at Florida Atlantic University, which found those who consumed more junk food had a 47 percent higher risk of heart attack or stroke compared with those who ate the least.

The findings were stark enough for researchers to warn that the nation's fondness for processed foods represents an urgent public health priority similar to past efforts to curb tobacco use.

It comes as the food on American tables has come under increasing criticism from U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as part of his Make America Healthy Again initiative.

The study, which was published in the American Journal of Medicine, calls for more large-scale observational studies to verify its findings. In the meantime, health care providers should advise patients to decrease consumption of junk food, along with adopting other healthy lifestyle changes, it states.

"These results have major implications for future research as well as clinical care and public policy," said Charles H. Hennekens, professor of medicine and preventive medicine at FAU Schmidt College of Medicine.

Around 70 percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, and nearly a third of adolescents have prediabetes, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows. A 2016 study found that junk food comprises as much as 60 percent of American's diets.

In January, the departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture released new dietary guidelines and described the nation's diet as a "national health emergency." The guidelines urged Americans to eat real food like meat, vegetables, fruit and whole grains.

The same message was repeated during Sunday night's Super Bowl 60 broadcast with an advertisement showing former heavyweight world championship boxer Mike Tyson biting into an apple while the messages "Processed food kills" and "Eat real food" flashed. It was paid for by the MAHA Center, a new advocacy group aligned with the Make America Healthy Again movement, according to a New York Times report.

Florida Atlantic researchers from the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine used data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey from 2021 to 2023 to conduct their study.

Just under 4,800 adults who provided at least one day of detailed dietary records and information about heart attack or stroke were included in the study. The participants reported everything they ate for two days, which researchers used to calculate how much of their diet was ultra-processed food.

For the purposes of the study, ultra-processed foods were categorized as those that are industrially modified and loaded with added fats, sugars, starches, salts and chemical additives like emulsifiers.

"Addressing (ultra-processed foods) isn't just about individual choices – it's about creating environments where the healthy option is the easy option," said Hennekens. "Clinical guidance and public health education are necessary to make nutritious foods accessible and affordable for everyone."

Pink noise, a popular sleep aid, could disrupt sleep quality, study suggests

By KAYLA YUP
The Philadelphia Inquirer (TNS)

PHILADELPHIA — Marketed as a ticket to deeper sleep, the soft hum of pink noise has become part of millions' nightly routines.

However, its use may come at the cost of sleep quality, a University of Pennsylvania study suggests.

Published last week in the medical journal Sleep, the study found that the presence of pink noise at night reduced REM sleep – the stage when most vivid dreams occur and memory, emotional regulation, and learning are supported. This was based on a sample size of 25 healthy adults assessed over seven days in a sleep lab.

To Mathias Basner, a Penn professor of psychiatry and lead author on the study, it's evidence that background noise may not be risk-free.

"The negative consequences of the pink noise far outweigh the positive ones that we saw," he said.

Pink noise vs. white noise

Pink noise is what's called a "broadband noise," meaning sounds made up of a wide range of frequencies. The most well-known example of this, white noise, is considered the sound equivalent of the color white, which contains all colors combined.

Pink, brown, and other colored noises differ based on the frequencies they boost.

Pink noise, for example, emphasizes lower frequencies – making it sound similar to steady rainfall or ocean waves. It's often used for sleep, although uses for focus and tinnitus have also been reported.

These types of background noise can mask unwanted sounds – an appealing quality in an increasingly noisy world.

Since the first white noise machine for sleep was released in the 1960s, hundreds of variations have spawned. Today, 10-hour videos of pink noise, which is often preferred over white noise for sleep due to its softer sound, pick up millions of views on YouTube.

"So many people are using it, and it's really indiscriminate use," Basner said.

Putting pink noise to the test

Having studied the effects of noise his whole career, Basner was surprised to learn several years ago that some people used it as a sleep aid.

That led him down a rabbit hole of research, where he found dozens of studies assessing the effects of broadband noise on sleep. However, most of them were considered to be low quality – sample sizes were small and the assessments were usually subjective.

"We don't know whether it's working, whether it's harmful or not," he said.

He designed his study to occur in the hypercontrolled environment of a sleep lab at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, where participants were measured using polysomnography, a test that looks at brain waves, eye movements, and muscle tone.

This allowed his team to differentiate sleep stages and figure out what was happening biologically as participants were exposed to a variety of conditions: no noise, environmental noise, pink noise, pink noise and environmental noise combined, or environmental noise with ear plugs.

Each night, the 25 participants, comprised of 18 women and seven men, were given an eight-hour window to sleep. (Lights were out at 11 p.m. and back on at 7 a.m.)

His team found that environmental noise – which ranged from the sound of a helicopter to a sonic boom – led to a 23.4-minute decrease in stage 3 sleep. This so-called deep sleep phase where recovery occurs is important for physical repair and immune function, as well as memory.

And while pink noise didn't affect deep sleep, it was associated with an average decrease of 18.6 minutes in REM sleep.

"REM sleep is extremely important for a lot of things like memory consolidation, emotion regulation, brain plasticity, and neurodevelopment," Basner said.

Though the study didn't look at children, he cautioned that babies spend around half of their time sleeping in REM, compared to a quarter in adults.

Based on his findings, he would discourage parents from using broadband noise machines in the bedrooms of newborns.

ABOVE: Pink noise emphasizes lower frequencies – making it sound similar to steady rainfall or ocean waves. It's often used for sleep, although uses for focus and tinnitus have also been reported.
Ernest Akayeu / Dreamstime / TNS

For adults who don't want to forego the noise, he would recommend using the lowest volume and setting a timer so it eventually turns off.

However, the best option would be to use foam ear plugs, he said. When paired with environmental noise in the study, they were able to block out noise and recover 72 percent of the deep sleep time that had been lost – although they did start losing effectiveness at higher noise levels, around 65 decibels.

"You didn't get the REM sleep reduction because they didn't play anything back," Basner said.

A limitation of the study is that it had a relatively small sample size comprised of younger, healthy people without sleep disorders or hearing loss. It also only looked at the short-term effects of pink noise, and was conducted in a lab setting, versus the participants' homes.

In the future, Basner hopes to study the long-term effects of pink noise on sleep, as well as test other types of broadband noise.

"We need to do the proper research to make sure that it is actually, at least, not harmful," he said.

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Winter blues and seasonal affective disorder

By SARAH ADAMS, M.D., FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Some of us may experience the "winter blues" – feeling sad from short days, climbing into bed earlier and resenting waking up on dark mornings. That's different than seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a term used to describe a type of depression that follows a seasonal pattern.

The most common form of seasonal affective disorder occurs in winter, although some people do experience symptoms during spring and summer. And while seasonal affective disorder is often talked about in terms of adults, children and adolescents are not necessarily immune.

Seasonal affective disorder usually develops in a person's early 20s with the risk decreasing as you get older. It can also occur in older children and teens. The condition is diagnosed most often in young women, but men who are also diagnosed may suffer more severe symptoms. People with a family history of seasonal affective disorder or those who live in northern latitudes where daylight hours during winter are shorter are at a higher risk for developing it.

When experiencing seasonal affective disorder, a person may withdraw from social situations, lose interest in things that they previously enjoyed, have trouble sleeping, experience decreased appetite, or crave comfort foods such as simple carbs like pasta, breads and sugar. Those excess calories and lack of healthier food options can lead to increased fatigue and weight gain. Those living with the disorder may also feel anxious, irritable or have trouble sleeping, but these symptoms are more prominent in those who experience the spring/summer form.

Researchers have not determined what causes seasonal affective disorder, but there is some evidence pointing to a disruption of a person's "circadian rhythm" – the body's natural cycle of sleeping and waking. As the days shorten, the decreasing amount of light can throw off the body's natural clock, triggering depression.

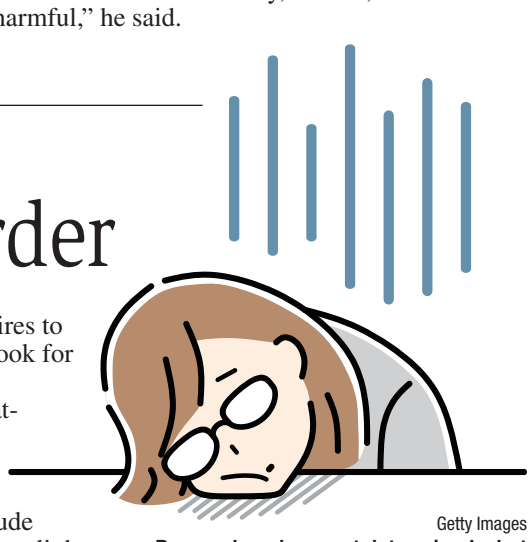
Sunlight also plays a role in the brain's production of melatonin and serotonin. During winter, your body produces more melatonin (which encourages sleep) and less serotonin (which fights depression). Researchers do not know why some people are more susceptible to the disorder than others.

In general, seasonal affective disorder is a better-recognized disorder in adults because so many children's mental health disorders emerge over time. This makes diagnosing the disorder in a child more difficult. A doctor will typically try to determine whether a child is suffering from depression or anxiety first, then look at the pattern over time. The diagnosis is made only if a person meets criteria for a diagnosis of depression and if a seasonal pattern of symptoms has been present for at least 2 years.

In order to diagnose seasonal affective disorder, doctors need to perform a medical exam to rule out other possible causes of the symptoms. They may also administer questionnaires to determine mood and look for seasonal patterns.

Several effective treatments can help ease the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder but most include increased exposure to sunlight either via open window shades, time spent outdoors, light therapy or a dawn simulator that gradually turns on the bedroom light, tricking the body into thinking it's an earlier sunrise. Other treatments can include regular exercise, a healthy diet or even a mid-winter vacation to a sunny climate.

If none of these treatments work, prescription antidepressants may help regulate the balance of serotonin and other neurotransmitters that affect mood. Antidepressants, however, come with a "black box" warning about the risk of suicidal thoughts and behavior. Parents with children on antidepressants need to be vigilant in watching for agitation, anxiety or insomnia and make sure they continue to see their physician on a regular basis.

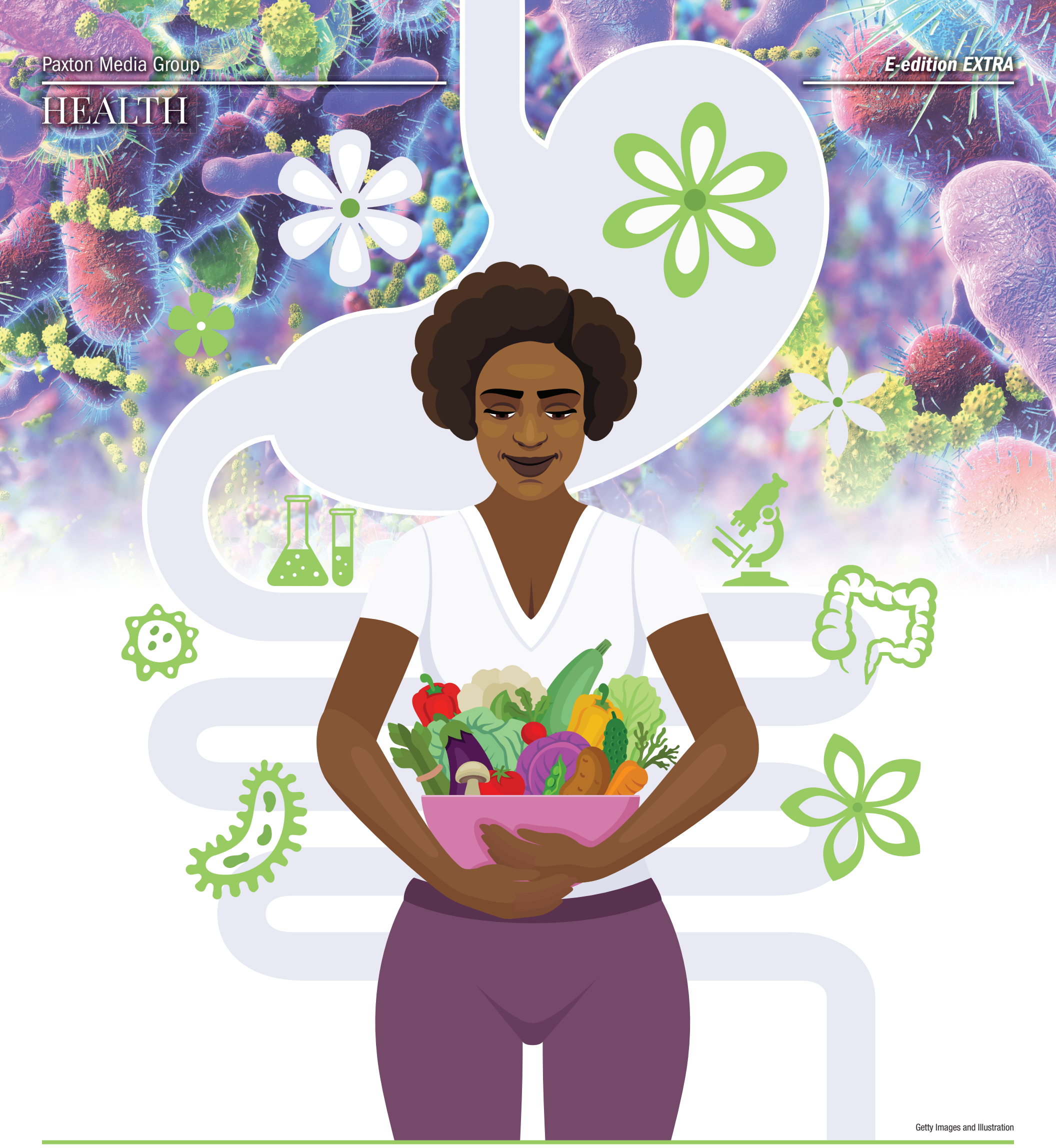


Getty Images

Researchers have not determined what causes seasonal affective disorder, but there is some evidence pointing to a disruption of a person's "circadian rhythm" – the body's natural cycle of sleeping and waking.

Whether you notice symptoms of seasonal affective disorder in yourself or in your child, take it seriously. Treating this disorder early and diligently can turn the dark days of winter into a pleasant time of togetherness for your family. If symptoms persist or interfere with daily life, families should talk with their child's pediatrician, who can help guide next steps and determine whether additional support is needed.

Sarah Adams, MD, FAAP, is a pediatrician and national spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics.



Getty Images and Illustration

Your gut microbes can be anti-aging

Scientists are uncovering how to keep your microbiome youthful

By BILL SULLIVAN
Indiana University (The Conversation)

People have long given up on the search for the Fountain of Youth, a mythical spring that could reverse aging. But for some scientists, the hunt has not ended – it's just moved to a different place. These modern-day Ponce de Leóns are investigating whether gut microbes hold the secret to aging well.

The gut microbiome refers to the vast collection of microscopic organisms – bacteria, fungi and viruses – that largely inhabit the colon. These microbes aid in digestion and produce molecules that affect your physiologyand psychology. The composition of the microbiome is influenced by a combination of factors, including genetics, diet, the environment, medications and age.

I'm a microbiology professor and author of "Pleased to Meet Me: Genes, Germs and the Curious Forces That Make Us Who We Are," which describes how the gut microbiome contributes to physical and mental health. The discovery that the gut microbiome changes with age has ignited studies to determine whether the Fountain of Youth might be right under your nose, down inside your gut.

You're only as old as your gut microbes

People are most familiar with outward signs of aging, such as wrinkles and graying hair, but there are also microscopic changes taking place deep inside. The gut microbes of older people tend to be less diverse, with more bacteria that promote inflammation and other hallmarks of aging. Changes to the microbiome across age are so consistent that algorithms can reliably predict a person's age based on their microbiome composition.

There are exceptions to this rule. Older adults and supercentenarians who age well have a gut microbiome that looks more like those of younger people. These findings support the idea that maintaining a youthful microbiome fosters healthy aging and longevity.

To confirm that the microbes of youth influence aging, scientists use a technique called fecal microbiota transplantation. This procedure involves obliterating a person's current gut microbiome and replacing it with microbes harvested from a donor's feces. Transplanting microbiota from a young mouse into an elderly mouse reverses age-associated inflammation in the gut, brain and eyes. Conversely, transplanting microbiota from an old mouse into a young one accelerates these aging parameters. Other studies suggest that microbiota from young mice alter metabolism in ways that reduce inflammation that accelerates aging.

The evidence that aging is linked with the microbiome is compelling. However, fecal transplantation is not without risk and is approved only as a last resort to treat severe C. difficile infections. These shortcomings have prompted researchers to search for safer and more refined ways to cultivate an age-friendly microbiome.

Diet and exercise may slow aging

Proper diet and exercise have long been tied to better aging and longevity. One way these lifestyle habits may be beneficial is through their influence on gut microbes.

What people eat – or fail to eat – has a demonstrable effect on their gut microbiomes. The standard American diet, enriched with ultraprocessed foods that are high in sugar, fat and salt and low in nutrients and fiber, depletes microbiomediversity within days. Moving from a non-Western country to the U.S. is also associated with loss of gut microbiome diversity, partly due to dietary changes.

Lack of fiberis a major reason the microbiome adopts a configuration associated with poor aging. Studies in roundworms, mice and rats found that fiber supplements improved overall health and extended lifespan by 20 percent to 35 percent. A 2025 study showed that increasing the amount of fiber in your diet is linked to as much as a 37 percent greater likelihood of healthy aging in women.

Fiber functions as a prebiotic, a nondigestible food component that nourishes the microbiome. Gut bacteria process fiber into compounds such as short-chain fatty acids that promote better aging by improving metabolic, brain and immune function while reducing chronic inflammation. Good sources of prebiotics include most fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

Certain foods, such as yogurt and kefir, or dietary supplements contain probiotics – living microbes that may benefit the gut microbiome. Research on probiotic foods and supplements is mixed, complicated by the variation in bacterial species and dosage in these products. The health benefits that different types of probiotics may confer is still under study.

Physical activity is also linked to a youthful microbiome. Regular exercise can reshape the microbiome of older adults to resemble those seen in younger adults. One study showed that when people ages 50 to 75 underwent 24 weeks of cardiovascular and resistance exercise, their microbiomes became populated by healthier bacteria and their blood had elevated levels of aging-friendly, short-chain fatty acids.

Treatments to manipulate the microbiome

Making healthy lifestyle changes is a noninvasive way to cultivate a youthful microbiome that may slow aging. Scientists are also exploring treatments to tailor the gut microbiome for better health outcomes.

One option may be postbiotics, nonliving but active compounds that probiotic microbes produce. For example, mouse studies have found that short-chain fatty acid supplements can improve age-related heart and lung problems. Similarly, elderly mice given heat-killed bacteria from a human infant saw reduced metabolic dysfunction and inflammation, as well as improved cognitive function.

The microbiome can also be modified with drugs, particularly antibiotics. A low-dose oral antibiotic can trigger gut bacteria to release factors that may promote good health and aging by, for example, strengthening the intestinal barrier or reducing inflammation. One such antibiotic, cephaloridine, extends the lifespan of roundworms and mice by triggering gut bacteria to make colanic acid, an anti-aging compound.

Bacteriophages, or phages, offer yet another potential way to manipulate the microbiome for health. Phages are highly selective viruses that infect and kill specific species of bacteria. Phages have been used to treat severe infections from bacteria resistant to antibiotics. Given that phages can alter the gut microbiome of mice, researchers are studying whether they could be used to eliminate gut bacteria associated with unhealthy aging.

Aging is a natural process that can bring many rewards. Cultivating a healthy microbiome could help people enjoy their golden years more fully.

Bill Sullivan is a professor of microbiology and immunology at Indiana University. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

FINANCE

Alex Wong / Getty Images / TNS

U.S. President Donald Trump speaks during a roundtable discussion with top business leaders in the Roosevelt Room at the White House on Dec. 10, 2025, in Washington, D.C. During the roundtable, Trump addressed questions on the Federal Reserve's latest decision to cut interest rates and reports that the U.S. seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela, among other topics.

Tracking Trump's affordability proposals

How his policies could affect your wallet

By ALEX GAILEY
Bankrate.com (TNS)

President Donald Trump and his administration have made a lot of big promises to improve affordability since taking office. Those promises have ramped up as consumers increasingly feel pinched by the U.S. economy, from sticky inflation and a stagnant job market to high interest rates. The macroeconomic data broadly suggests that the economy is chugging along just fine, but there's been a growing mismatch between what the data shows and how average Americans feel about their finances.

Many economists chalk this up to the U.S. increasingly operating as a K-shaped economy – one where the highest-income Americans continue to see their income and wealth rise, while the less well-off face continued, or growing, financial strife. The fortunate few are propping up the economy with their spending, the argument goes, while middle and lower-income Americans are falling further behind because of the cumulative impact of higher prices, weaker wage gains, fewer job openings and more.

To help cut through the noise, Bankrate is tracking the Trump administration's affordability proposals that could have the biggest impact on your wallet. Below is a look at what Trump has proposed since taking office to improve affordability and where those proposals stand today.

Housing

■ Ban institutional investors from buying single-family homes

THE PROPOSAL: Trump issued an executive order on Jan. 20, 2026, targeting large institutional investors that buy single-family homes, with the goal of keeping more of those homes available for families. The order limits certain federal housing programs from approving, backing or otherwise helping with sales that could reasonably go to individual homebuyers. However, the order doesn't clearly spell out what counts as a "single-family home" or who qualifies as a "large institutional investor." It directs the Treasury secretary to define those terms by Feb. 19.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. The executive order requests several federal agencies to issue guidance, review current regulations and implement requirements on large institutional investors buying or holding single-family homes. But no material action has been taken yet by agencies or Congress.

DATE PROPOSED: Jan. 7, 2026

NUMBER OF NOTE: 17 percent. That's the percentage of real estate investors of all sizes – small investors and large institutions – who bought U.S. homes in the third quarter of 2025, according to Redfin.

■ The 50-year mortgage

THE PROPOSAL: Trump floated the idea to offer a half-century home loan option to qualified mortgage borrowers, with the aim of improving access and affordability to a stuck-in-the-mud housing market. Currently, anything beyond a 30-year home loan, such as the existing 40-year option, is a non-qualified mortgage.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) Director Bill Pulte told the media that the Trump administration had "other priorities."

DATE PROPOSED: Nov. 18, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: $389,000. That's the long-haul added cost in accruing interest of tacking another two decades onto the standard 30-year mortgage, according to an Associated Press analysis.

■ $200 billion mortgage bond move

THE PROPOSAL: Trump ordered Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to purchase $200 billion in mortgage-backed securities in a bid to lower mortgage rates, with Pulte subsequently authorizing even higher limits.

WHERE IT STANDS: In effect. Mortgage rates responded positively to the news on Jan. 9, with the average 30-year rate dipping below 6 percent for the first time in nearly three years. They've since moved back up to the low-6 percent range and stayed there.

DATE PROPOSED: Jan. 8, 2026

NUMBER OF NOTE: 10 percent. While $200 billion sounds like a lot of money, it's only about one-tenth of the $2 trillion in mortgage-backed securities held by the Federal Reserve.

■ Tap 401(k) funds for down payments

THE PROPOSAL: Allow aspiring homebuyers to tap their 401(k) retirement accounts – without penalty – for down payments toward a property purchase. The plan would conceivably ease the process of accessing 401(k) loans that already exist.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. Trump told the White House press corps that he was "not a huge fan" of this proposal, about a week after White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett told Fox Business Network that Trump would unveil a "final plan" for it at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

DATE PROPOSED: Jan. 16, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: 5 years. Under current IRS rules, you must repay 401(k) loans within this timeframe. However, leaving your employer could trigger a faster repayment of the debt.

Investing

■ "Trump accounts" for kids

THE PROPOSAL: Seed investment accounts with $1,000 of Uncle Sam's money – and private donations from philanthropists – for American babies born between Jan. 1, 2025 and Dec. 31, 2028. The Trump accounts are controlled by each child's legal guardian until age 18. Parents can contribute up to $5,000 per year, and a growing number of companies have announced plans to offer employee matching.

WHERE IT STANDS: Coming soon. These government-subsidized savings vehicles for children are scheduled to become available July 4, 2026.

DATE PROPOSED: June 9, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: $149,000. The initial $1,000 deposit would grow to this amount after 65 years, assuming an 8 percent, inflation-adjusted return, according to Bankrate's Kates. It would similarly grow to $4,000 over 18 years and $10,000 over 30.

Credit

■ A one-year, 10 percent cap on credit card APRs

THE PROPOSAL: Force credit card issuers to max out interest rates at 10 percent, so the "American public" won't "be 'ripped off,'" Trump announced on Truth Social.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) introduced a bill to cap rates for five years. Trump had initially called for a one-year ceiling to take effect on Jan 20.

DATE PROPOSED: Jan. 9, 2026

NUMBER OF NOTE: 19.61 percent. That's the average APR on credit cards charged interest as of early February, the latest data available from Bankrate.

■ Tax deductions on auto loan interest

THE PROPOSAL: This new tax benefit lets you write off up to $10,000 a year in interest paid on an auto loan for a qualifying vehicle. You can claim the deduction whether you take the standard deduction or itemize, but it only applies to purchases made between the beginning of 2025 and the end of 2028. One key requirement: the vehicle must undergo final assembly in the U.S.

WHERE IT STANDS: In effect, as part of the Trump administration's One Big Beautiful Bill.

DATE PROPOSED: July 4, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: $10,000. This new tax deduction allows taxpayers to deduct up to that much in auto loan interest after purchasing a qualifying vehicle.

■ Keep some medical debt on credit reports

THE PROPOSAL: Allow credit bureaus to report unpaid medical debt over $5,000 on consumers' credit reports, building on the momentum of a federal ruling in July 2025 that stopped the Biden administration's Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) from its efforts in the opposite direction.

WHERE IT STANDS: In effect. The Trump administration's watered-down CFPB issued a rule last fall barring states from removing medical debt from credit reports.

DATE PROPOSED: Oct. 28, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: $49 billion. This amount of unpaid medical bills would have been removed from credit reports nationwide, boosting credit scores by an average of 20 points for about 15 million Americans, according to the Biden-era CFPB.

■ Lower credit card processing fees

THE PROPOSAL: Increase competition among credit card issuers as the means to decrease transaction processing surcharges, or "swipe fees."

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Roger Marshall (R-Ka.) introduced the Credit Card Competition Act in 2023 – but Trump's early 2026 support of it revived debate.

DATE PROPOSED: Jan. 13, 2026

NUMBER OF NOTE: 80 percent. That's the senators' estimate of how much of the credit card market is controlled by what it calls the "Visa-Mastercard duopoly."

Economy

■ Announce next Federal Reserve Chair

THE PROPOSAL: Trump has been putting political pressure on Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell to lower interest rates since early 2025, publicly criticizing him and urging him to step down. As of January 2026, Powell is the subject of a U.S. Department of Justice criminal investigation into his congressional testimony about the Federal Reserve's $2.5 billion headquarters renovation project.

WHERE IT STANDS: With the investigation ongoing, the situation remains stalled. Powell has dismissed the probe as politically motivated. On Jan. 30, President Trump announced he will nominate Kevin Warsh to be the next Federal Reserve chair when Powell's term as chair ends in May 2026.

DATE PROPOSED: April 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: Three. That's how many rate cuts Bankrate's 2026 Interest Rate Forecast projects for 2026, totaling 0.75 percentage point.

■ $2,000 tariff dividend checks

THE PROPOSAL: President Donald Trump announced last fall on Truth Social that Americans would receive $2,000 tariff dividend checks from the government by mid-2026.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. Tariff dividend checks will need Congressional approval.

DATE PROPOSED: Nov. 9, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: $200 billion. That's how much the U.S. reportedly collected in tariffs from Jan. 20 to Dec. 15, according to a statement released by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Student loans

■ Restrict Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) eligibility

THE PROPOSAL: The U.S. Department of Education under the Trump administration is overhauling the PSLF program and issued a final rule on Oct. 30 that narrows eligibility for the program. The rule targets employers engaged in what the administration defines as "illegal activities," including those related to discrimination, terrorism and transgender issues.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. The final rule is slated to take effect July 1, 2026, however, more than a dozen states have sued the administration over it.

DATE PROPOSED: Oct. 30, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: 10 years. Under the PSLF program, student loan debt is forgiven for government and nonprofit employees after a decade of qualifying payments.

■ Move federal student loan servicing

THE PROPOSAL: The federal student loan portfolio is currently managed by Federal Student Aid (FSA) within the U.S. Department of Education, but there are proposals to shift this responsibility to other agencies, such as the U.S. Department of the Treasury or the Small Business Administration (SBA), or even private lenders.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. These proposals, which were first surfaced as part of Project 2025, haven't made progress. As of now, federal student loans remain under the Department of Education.

DATE PROPOSED: March 21, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: $1.6 trillion. The U.S. Department of Education oversees roughly this much in federal student loan debt for over 40 million borrowers.

■ Wage garnishment on defaulted student loans

THE PROPOSAL: The Department of Education announced on Dec. 23 that it would restart collections for borrowers with defaulted student loans, but reversed course within weeks. The department is now indefinitely delaying wage garnishment while it works to implement major student loan repayment reforms passed under the Trump administration's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

WHERE IT STANDS: Paused. The Department of Education said in a Jan. 16 statement that it would delay garnishing wages, seizing tax refunds and collecting other benefits from federal student loan borrowers in default.

DATE PROPOSED: Dec. 23, 2025

NUMBER OF NOTE: 8.8 million. The number of borrowers that were 270-plus days delinquent on their federal student loans as of the end of last year, according to advocacy group Protect Borrowers.

Insurance

■ Lower auto insurance rates

THE PROPOSAL: Lower car insurance costs for Americans at a time when the price of buying and maintaining a vehicle is at an all-time high.

WHERE IT STANDS: Stalled. Trump's post on X (formerly Twitter) in the fall of 2024 hasn't appeared to move the needle, in part because insurance is regulated at the state level.

DATE PROPOSED: Sept. 17, 2024

NUMBER OF NOTE: 73 percent. The increased cost of auto insurance, according to Trump's accounting. However, that figure has been debunked by insurance experts interviewed by Bankrate.

Visit Bankrate online at bankrate.com.

FOOD

5 dishes to make with a rotisserie chicken

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

If ever there was liberation to be found in the never-ending grind of nightly meal preparation, it's got to be the ready-to-go product scorned by some but beloved by many: the supermarket rotisserie chicken.

Personally, the plump and juicy birds have come to the rescue more times than I care to count in my own kitchen over the years, both as a last-minute main course served with veggies and rice and picked clean to star in chicken salad.

Groceries and warehouse clubs like Sam's and Costco do flawlessly what many of us struggle to do at home – roast a whole chicken to golden-brown perfection on a rotating spit so that every morsel is cooked evenly and deliciously tender.

Admit it, you've torn into one with your finger while standing over the kitchen sink because you just! can't! wait! to get a taste of that heavenly smelling, rich and flavorful meat, right?

Sure, it might be cheaper to buy a raw broiler and cook it yourself. But do you really want to invest two or three hours to roast a 4- to 6-pound chicken on a busy weeknight when you've got a much easier option right at hand? You're likely at the store anyway trying to figure out something quick and easy, so why not give in to the convenience a precooked bird offers?

That, in a nutshell, is the beauty of a rotisserie chicken. It stands at the ready, hot, fresh and ready to eat. All you need is a carving knife and fork.

Already got that night's dinner planned? If you pick and pull the meat from the bone – a process that takes about 10 minutes – then shred it or cut it into bite-sized chunks, you've got a terrific, cost-effective building block for several meals.

A 3-pound bird at Costco – which yields about 4 cups of meat, depending on how thoroughly you pick it – runs just $4.99, while a 2-pound chicken at Giant Eagle costs $7.99 and will net around 3 cups.

We've rustled up five recipes using rotisserie chicken that will make short work of dinner. They include a chili-forward chicken tortilla soup that will take the chill off a cold winter day; chicken enchiladas topped with a spicy roasted poblano sauce; a silky chicken pasta with a sun-dried tomato cream sauce; a tangy Asian chicken salad that gets its crunch from cabbage and also includes fresh citrus; and for fans in search of a quick and easy tailgate nosh for Super Bowl, buffalo chicken pizza balls.

None of them take more than a half-hour to prepare, including prep time, putting dinner on the table in about the same time it takes to watch an episode of my favorite predinner show, "Jeopardy."

A few tips for choosing a rotisserie chicken:

■ Larger is definitely better when picking a precooked bird, so look for one that feels heavy for its size. If it's plump, it's going to be moist.

■ The skin should be evenly browned, with taut skin. If it's shriveled, that means it's been overcooked and lost moisture.

■ Always look for a timestamp to see how long it's been sitting out; a fresh bird will have a steamy package.

Gretchen McKay / Post-Gazette / TNS

Chinese chicken salad features pulled rotisserie chicken, orange segments and cabbage in a tangy soy sauce-based dressing.

Chicken Tortilla Soup
Serves 6-8

This soup is a family favorite. It comes together quickly and is so warm and comforting on a cold winter evening!

You can find ancho chilies in most larger grocery stores and Latin American markets like Reyna Foods in the Strip District. I add sliced tortilla strips to give it more heft and corn flavor.

3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
3 ancho chilies, stemmed, seeded and torn into large pieces
1 (15-ounce) can fire-roasted tomatoes
1/2 medium yellow or white onion, coarsely chopped
1 clove garlic
8 cups chicken stock or broth
2 cups rotisserie chicken, shredded or cubed
Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
1/2 cup canola oil, for frying
14 white or yellow corn tortillas, sliced into 1/4 -inch strips
2 avocados, pitted, peeled and cubed
1-2 cups shredded quesadilla or Monterey Jack cheese
2 limes, cut into wedges
Chopped fresh cilantro

Heat 1 tablespoon oil over high heat and fry the torn chili pieces quickly for about 1-2 minutes on each side. Be careful not to burn them or they will have a bitter taste.

Puree fried chilies with tomatoes, onion and garlic in a blender. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons oil in a deep pot over high heat.

Add blended ingredients and fry for about 5 minutes. Add chicken broth and simmer for 30 minutes.

Add chicken and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.

In a large skillet, heat canola oil over medium-high heat and fry tortilla strips until lightly browned around the edges, about 45 seconds. Transfer to paper towels to drain.

Set out separate bowls along with avocados, cheese, lime and cilantro.

Ladle soup into bowls and top with a handful of tortilla strips. Each person can add avocados, a squeeze of lime juice, cheese and cilantro according to taste.

Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

Enchiladas Pachuquenas
Serves 4

If you love salsa verde sauce, you'll adore this recipe. It comes from the stellar cookbook "Enchiladas: Aztec to Tex Mex" by Cappy Lawton and Chris Waters Dunn (Trinity University Press, $34.95) and hails from Pachuca in Hidalgo. It features a creamy green sauce made with roasted poblanos, peanuts and cream on top of corn tortillas stuffed with shredded rotisserie chicken. Queso fresco, a mild and milky cheese, balances spicy food exceptionally well.

With so many peppers, it sounds like it will be spicy. But it's only mildly so, since poblanos have a lot less heat than, say, jalapeños.

FOR FILLING:
2 cups shredded rotisserie chicken
3/4 cup queso fresco
FOR SAUCE:
6 poblano chiles, fire roasted, peeled, seeded and deveined, divided
1 medium white onion, peeled and roughly chopped
1/2 cup roasted peanuts
1 slice French bread, soaked in 1 cup whole milk
1 tablespoon vegetable oil for frying
1/2 cup heavy cream
Milk or water, for thinning sauce
Kosher salt
For assembly
12 corn tortillas
Vegetable oil
FOR GARNISH:
Sliced radishes
Shredded iceberg lettuce
Reserved poblano chile, chopped
1/4 cup queso fresco, crumbled

Make filling: Mix shredded chicken with queso fresco and set aside.

Prepare sauce: Place 5 prepared poblano peppers, onion, roasted peanuts and bread with soaking milk in a blender and puree until smooth.

Strain through a medium-mesh strainer.

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Add poblano puree, reduce heat to medium low and cook 5-8 minutes, or until sauce slightly darkens.

Stir in cream. Taste and season with salt. Gently simmer for a few minutes longer to allow the flavors to meld. Add milk or water as needed to attain a medium sauce consistency. Cover, set aside and keep warm.

Assemble enchiladas: (Have the garnishes ready at hand.) Pour 1/2 inch oil into heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Heat to low frying temperature (about 300 degrees).

Place each tortilla in oil and fry for a few seconds, just long enough to soften. Drain on paper towels.

Dip a softened tortilla in warm sauce. Place 2 tablespoons filling on each tortilla. Fold in half and place, slightly overlapping, on a warm individual plate, 3 enchiladas per serving. Top with more sauce.

Garnish with radishes, lettuce, polano and queso fresco.

"Enchiladas: Aztec to Tex-Mex" by Cappy Lawton and Chris Waters Dunn

(Re)marry-Me Chicken Pasta
Serves 4

This hearty riff on Marry-Me Chicken is a must-have if you love the rich flavor of sun-dried tomatoes. It's probably not for the calorie-conscious – it includes both Parmesan and cream – but it will hit the spot if you're looking for a creamy, rich dish.

I used rigatoni, but any favorite pasta will work.
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
3/4 cup chicken broth
1/2 cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/3 cup finely grated Parmesan, plus more for garnish
2 cups shredded rotisserie chicken
1/2 pound cooked rigatoni or other favorite pasta
Fresh basil, torn, for serving, optional

In skillet over medium heat, heat 2 tablespoons oil. Stir in garlic, thyme and red pepper flakes.

Cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in broth, tomatoes, cream, and Parmesan; season with salt and bring to a simmer.

Add shredded chicken to pan, and toss to combine. Cook over low heat until heated through, about 5 minutes.

Add cooked pasta and stir well to combine. Serve immediately, with additional Parmesan for dusting and torn basil.

Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

Asian Chicken Salad
Serves 4

It can be tough to figure out how to dress up crunchy winter veggies like cabbage. This crisp and tangy salad, which also features winter citrus, is both healthful and satisfying.

I shredded the rotisserie chicken, but you could also cut it into fork-friendly chunks or slice into larger portions. Add the dressing a little at a time to prevent sogginess and be sure to toss gently (I used my hands) so it's evenly coated.

If you don't have fresh mandarins, canned is great – just be sure to drain all the juice.

FOR DRESSING:
2 tablespoons soy sauce
3 tablespoons unseasoned rice wine vinegar
1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 teaspoon sugar
1-inch knob fresh ginger, finely minced or grated
1 garlic clove, minced
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
FOR SALAD:
2 cups shredded green cabbage
2 cups shredded red cabbage
1 cup mandarin orange segments
1/2 cup shredded carrot
2 cups chicken shredded rotisserie
3 scallions, finely sliced on the diagonal
FOR GARNISH:
1 cup fried tortilla strips or chow mein noodles
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds

Make dressing. In large bowl, whisk together soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, sesame oil, vegetable oil, sugar, ginger, garlic and black pepper until well combined. Set aside while you prepare salad.

In second large bowl, toss together green and red cabbage, orange segments, carrot, chicken and scallions.

Add to bowl with dressing, and toss well to combine. Allow to sit for 10 minutes to allow cabbage to soften.

Garnish with fried tortilla strips and sesame seeds, and serve.

Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

Buffalo Chicken Pizza Balls
Makes 24 balls

These super-easy pizza puffs are filled with that quintessential pregame nosh: Buffalo chicken. If you can cut refrigerated pizza dough into squares, you can make these! A brush of garlic butter before baking adds a savory finish.

1 package refrigerated pizza dough
1 1/2 cups shredded rotisserie chicken
4 ounces (1/2 package) cream cheese, softened
4 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
1/4 cup blue cheese or ranch dressing
1/4 cup Frank's RedHot Sauce, or more to taste
FOR TOPPING:
2 tablespoons melted butter
1 teaspoon fresh parsley
1 clove garlic, finely minced
Generous pinch of salt

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees and grease a baking sheet with olive oil or butter.

Roll a package of pizza dough onto the baking sheet and cut into 24 squares.

Prepare chicken dip. In large bowl, mix shredded chicken, cream cheese, cheddar cheese, blue cheese or ranch dressing and Frank's RedHot until well combined.

Scoop 1 tablespoon of Buffalo dip onto each dough square, then fold the opposite corners to each other so they overlap.

Press the seams together, flip over so the seam is down, and shape gently into a ball.

Combine melted butter, parsley, garlic and salt in a small bowl.

Brush the sauce onto each dough ball. Bake for 10-12 minutes in preheated oven, or until golden brown.

Serve hot, with ranch or blue cheese for dipping.

Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

Dunk (Peter Claffey), left, and Egg (Dexter Sol Ansell) share a moment in the "Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" season finale.
Steffan Hill / HBO Max / TNS

'A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms' showrunner on the Season 1 finale

By TRACY BROWN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

[This story contains spoilers for Episode 6 of " A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms."]

Ira Parker intended the very last scene of "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms," Episode 6 (titled "The Morrow"), to be just "something that was a little funny."

Sunday's season finale of the HBO fantasy series ends with everyone, including the royal Targaryen entourage, departing Ashford after the conclusion of the trial and tournament. Just before the credits roll, Prince Maekar, who notices his young son Aegon is once again missing, frantically shouts, "Where the f--- is he?"

"To be honest, the very, very, very end was almost just meant as a joke," the showrunner says during a recent video call. "But I think people – both in my writing camp and in the HBO camp and probably in the world – took that quite literally. So I've maybe had to deal with it a little bit more in Season 2 than I was planning to."

Starring Peter Claffey as Ser Duncan the Tall and Dexter Sol Ansell as Prince Aegon Targaryen, "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" is an adaptation of George R.R. Martin novellas set in the same world as his "A Song of Ice and Fire" series. These "Tales of Dunk and Egg" stories take place around 100 years before the events depicted in "Game of Thrones."

The moment in question could be a big deal for some fans of Martin's novellas. The scene is not included in "The Hedge Knight," the book upon which the first season of "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" is based. Whether Egg had Maekar's permission to join Dunk's travels as his squire is left more open ended in the novella itself.

While the young prince said he had his father's blessing, "it's not confirmed canonically" in the book, says Parker. "We haven't done anything egregious here, I don't think. [And] I believe it from a character perspective. I believe that Egg would do that again, because he's already done it. We've seen him. He runs away. That's sort of his thing. And he lies to people."

Without sharing any details, Parker teases the situation will be addressed again next season.

The showrunner, who co-created the series with Martin, admits that approaching "The Morrow" was "daunting." Set in the aftermath of Trial of Seven, Episode 6 involved "a lot of creation" to stretch out the remaining events from the source material.

"Very early on, all of us knew that we weren't going to add any story," says Parker, who previously worked on "Thrones" prequel "House of the Dragon." "The story is the story. We're going to be 100 percent faithful to the novellas in that respect. But where we could add, because we needed about another 50 percent of material in order to fill out even our six 30-minute episodes, was going to be in the characters."

This has meant the show has spent more time with the very relatable Dunk and his precocious charge Egg. Its supporting ensemble including Lyonel Baratheon (Daniel Ings) and Raymun Fossoway (Shaun Thomas), who give Dunk a helping hand, have also been more fleshed out. This has allowed audiences to just "enjoy hanging out in this world."

"I wasn't always convinced that people would allow us to do it," Parker says. "Hanging out in Westeros. It meant a little bit of a slower start. Luckily, people have come along with us on the ride. ... We really just hoped that people would be charmed enough by these characters and the story and want good things for Dunk."

Like "The Hedge Knight," the episode concludes by teasing Dunk and Egg's journey to Dorne, but Parker confirms Season 2 will be an adaptation of the second novella, "The Sworn Sword," which takes place a year and a half or so after the events of "The Hedge Knight" and sees the pair in a part of the Reach.

"I love 'The Sworn Sword' because I think it's very funny, and I think the sort of 'will they / won't they' between Dunk and Lady Rohanne is just good territory for us," he says. (Parker said they considered setting Season 2 in Dorne but that it would have taken too much time to flesh out the story even with Martin's notes.)

In a conversation edited for clarity and length, Parker discussed his collaboration with Martin, every aspect of the show being a reflection of Dunk, and "A Knight of the Nine Kingdoms."

Q: The show is called "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms," but in the finale, Egg points out to Dunk that there are actually nine kingdoms in Westeros. Can you explain that moment and actually showing the alternate title card?

A: The situation is so overwrought in this episode. With Baelor's death and with everything that Egg has gone through, which we see him struggling with. Where Dunk's head is at, going off alone again. The fact that they both get together is wonderful and uplifting, but we sort of had to reassure the audience – that even though Egg is now officially a prince and Dunk knows that, and this tragedy has come to pass between the two of them, the core of that relationship, what we learned to love about their relationship before all of this happened, actually still remains. So that was the importance of having a type of conversation like that. It didn't necessarily have to be the conversation about the kingdoms, but just Egg, in his way, making sure that Dunk never feels like he knows anything. And it is a wink to the audience and to the fans [who have raised questions about the number], but we're not changing the name of the show.

Q: You mention Egg's struggles and we do see just how much anger he has toward his brother Aerion in this episode. What were your thoughts on depicting that onscreen and what it says about Egg?

A: I talked to George a little bit about Egg and his motivations early on, and George said kids feel disappointment more acutely and that that is a huge part of it. It's not to be discounted. I don't want to go out there and say it's because of Targaryen trauma and everything he's been through. He's a boy. Things were happening that were very nice for him that he was very happy about. Then it was all taken away and he blames people. He feels like he's caused all these problems [for others], and when that doesn't have a place to land, that's what turns into anger. It just sort of brews up inside of you.

He sees Aerion as the true cause of all this. At that young age, he doesn't know how to undirect that. He has some sort of a father there in Maekar. But the fact that he ends up with Dunk, that's the whole story of Episode 6. Is Dunk, after all this, going to decide to save this kid who is just going to be thrown to the wolves otherwise? Who's not going to get what he needs to direct his frustration and his disappointments to good energy targets? Kids who have that end up, generally, in better situations than kids who don't.

It's very important for me to show the importance of having a mentor in your life. We're obviously very thematically about fathers and sons, knights and squires, and, to a certain extent brothers. But it is, at the core of it, what it is to have a teacher. Dunk had that in Ser Arlan. Dunk certainly has no obligation to do anything for this family at this point and he does it ... because it was done for him. So he's paying it forward, being a benefit to the person next to him.

Q: That's one thing that sets Dunk apart. He's one of the few people we see in this world who believes in doing good and that that's what he's supposed to be doing.

A: There's an addition to that, which is that he wants so badly to do good and do right by his mentor who taught him what a knight was supposed to be. But there is this feeling that the world isn't going to let you do that. We see somebody like Ned Stark, who's very honorable, [but] probably suffered ultimately from his naivety – his belief in others. Dunk, I think, has one extra level. Or maybe I'm just projecting that onto him because sometimes I think about how to protect myself in this world where not everybody always has the best intentions. You so badly want to do good, but then there's also the reality of that, and a big part of Dunk's early journey in this world is learning those lessons.

Maybe that's just because my head is also stuck in Book Two, where I think that is brought even more to the forefront. But he's never going to change. He's always going to be hopeful.

Q: You did a Reddit AMA recently and you responded to someone who had asked about the show's production budget that everything in this show was a reflection of the lead character. Can you explain what you meant by that?

A: It's very chilling at the beginning to realize that you have one [point of view] character, but then when you realize how many facets go into making up that one person – from costumes, cinematography, music, everything – you realize you actually are telling a lot of different stories, just about one person and how they relate to the world. You have to make sure that that is one hell of an immersive experience, because it's not like you could just have an audience member tune out if they don't like the Dunk story this week. We had to make you feel in every single episode that you are in that situation, that you can somehow relate to Dunk and what he's going through. This is because it's about to get even tougher for him. Hopefully the people who come to us for the light, fun, enjoyable take on Westeros will stick with us through some of the harder, trickier, grimmer moments. Because this is George R.R. Martin's world, and it gets dangerous.

But it was actually a very nice, natural way for us to differentiate ourselves [from the other shows]. We're not a prequel. These are novellas that have existed for 30 years. It's more organic. Rather than being so grand and epic in scale, it's still small and simple and hopeful. [Dunk's] still basically just a kid. It's two kids setting out to have a little bit of fun. There's got to be some some whimsy about it. That very easily allowed us to find our own voice.

Q: How is it like to work with George R.R. Martin?

A: He has been wonderfully collaborative. It's been the most fulfilling creative partnership of my whole life. A lot of people can start out in this industry reading your stuff and telling you what they think is wrong without asking you why you did something the way that you did it. Giving you the benefit of the doubt and the conversation jumping off from there, George is very good at that. Whenever he would call me about a new script, we'd talk out what's in my head in the version of events that led me down this path. And then he talks about why he either did it another way or has issues with it. It becomes a very natural conversation. It's an extension of a writer's room with a living legend, one of the greatest living writers in the world today. He just likes talking about this stuff with you, and I like talking about it with him.

Q: What were your earliest conversations with him about "Dunk and Egg" like? Did you already have an idea of how you wanted to do the show before you talked to him?

A: I swung pretty wildly at the beginning from the point where HBO sent it to me – where I thought "Game of Thrones" shows are 10 episodes, an hourlong each, how could we possibly do that with these three novellas – to finding out what HBO's intentions were for it, finding out what George's intentions were for it. Having conversations with George about what he likes, why Dunk is his sole POV character. Why, for example, he never wrote any Egg chapters. He has so many specific thoughts on all of this that that really helped inform what my approach was going to be.

I think it was very important for me to go into that first meeting, when I flew to Santa Fe to meet him, with a mile-high preparation. I knew everything possibly in and around this world and these characters, and I had a lot of pitches, if it came to that. But I didn't go in there and lead with that. I just went and I sat down and we had conversations. I asked a lot of questions and I listened a lot. And then I went back and I re-formed and I went off and wrote a pilot. Then we were off to the races.

Q: You worked on "House of the Dragon," which is such a different show, even though it's in the same world. How did your time there affect how you wanted to approach this show?

A: That room was one of my favorite rooms that I've ever been in. Ryan Condal is a true writer's writer. He has so much love for this world. It's funny because everybody thinks comedy rooms are just so funny all the time, everybody's cracking jokes, and drama rooms are so serious because of the material. It's actually often the exact opposite. In drama, because comedy is not currency, everybody's just cracking jokes all the time. And Ryan has such a sharp wit; we share a very similar sense of humor. I think it was him who put me forward for this to HBO when they were looking for a writer for "Dunk and Egg," and I'm very grateful.

Our room for "Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" was very different. We hired all drama writers, just people that have different sensibilities. I felt like I was living my very best days. We had 11 days in that writer's room because the writers' strike shut us down so quickly, but we knew that that was coming up. So we got going as fast as we possibly could and we broke as much as we could. Then I assigned scripts the very last day. But those 11 days in that room, I think we broke, ultimately, 20 seasons of a show by accident.

We were having so much fun, we were creating it all for the first season. We did it all for six episodes. As soon as we got back from the strike, a few of my writers were just like, "How do you expect us to write 35-minute episodes with these beats to be broken?" We pulled it a lot, lot back from what that was, but writers rooms are the happiest place on Earth, or least lonely place on Earth. It's not always happy – it's hard sometimes.

TV REVIEW

Jeff Weddell / Disney / TNS

Zach Braff, left, and Donald Faison in ABC's revival of "Scrubs."

'Scrubs' revival brings back what made the original work, along with brilliant additions

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Suddenly it feels like the 2000s again, with a revived "Scrubs" premiering Wednesday on ABC and Tracy Morgan reincarnating the spirit of "30 Rock" in NBC's "The Fall and Rise of Reggie Dinkins" – network television shows, too, as in the days when streaming was just something tears and traffic did.

Beginning as a tale of new doctors at work and in love, "Scrubs" may also be seen as a looking-glass "Grey's Anatomy," although as "Scrubs" premiered first, it's fairer to say that "Grey's" is a straight-faced "Scrubs," probably not a thought that ever crossed Shonda Rhimes' mind. The show, then and now, combines a sentimental, satirical, soapy, sometimes surreal comedy with a straightforward medical show. Stars Zach Braff, Donald Faison and Sarah Chalke are back full-time, not quite in their old places, but arranged in close quarters, with Judy Reyes and John C. McGinley listed as recurring and other old faces slated to peek in.

The show left the air in 2016, after its ninth season, a virtual spinoff that has been declared non-canonical. The Season 8 finale saw protagonist, narrator and inveterate daydreamer J.D. (Braff), a person who really needs people – "I can't do this all on my own" runs the show's title song – looking into a happy future, married with a child to surgeon Elliot (Chalke). But that was just a dream, just a dream. The new season finds them at odds, and while a child is mentioned, it remains unseen, at least for the four episodes (of nine) out for review.

As we begin again, J.D. is working as a concierge doctor, tending to the minor ailments of the rich – cut toe, long-lasting chemically induced erection – when he's drawn back to Sacred Heart Hospital to check on a patient. By the end of the first episode, his former mentor, the acerbic yet strangely sympathetic Dr. Cox (McGinley), will give him a job, of which is officially a spoiler to describe – even though it's the premise of the show – noting his gift for teaching and reuniting J.D. with bromantic best friend Turk (Faison), the chief of surgery. ("Two chiefs!" is their chanted motto, followed by a special handshake. They are men who will be boys.) Turk is still married to head nurse Carla (Judy Reyes); they have four daughters, whom we do see, briefly. (J.D.'s appointment rankles Dr. Park, played by Joel Kim Booster, the series' designated mean person.)

Moving into the space Turk, J.D. and Elliot occupied 25 years earlier are a new crop of interns, bringing youth appeal and naivete (the better to instruct them). Blake (David Gridley) is a cocky know-it-all, who will become a less cocky know-it-not-all; Asher (Jacob Dudman) is British, insecure and attracted to Amara (Layla Mohammadi), who is homeschooled ("I almost won prom queen twice but my brothers voted for my mom") and a fan of Sam (Ava Bunn), a social media star who hangs her hands like Alexis Rose. Dashana (Amanda Morrow), the serious one, who sees Turk as an ally: "You're, like, the only Black surgeon in this place; the rest of them just got, like, Coldplay on loop in the ER and say things like, 'You're so articulate.'" ("This brother likes Coldplay, too," says Turk, pressing play on "Clocks." Another lesson learned.)

As before, the show is fast-paced, packed with asides and ironic cutaways, with jokes riding on the back of jokes and some unexpected slapstick (the best kind), though it will shift into a lower gear when something capital-I important needs to be said. The world has changed in 15 years ("I am now supposed to watch every word that comes out of my mouth because apparently they are all fragile little Christmas ornaments," grumbles Dr. Cox) and so the risqué material is left to the older characters, though the sex jokes now mostly amount to lack-of-sex jokes. ("She used to get worked up by 'Bridgerton,'" Turk says of Carla, "but the new season doesn't come out for another year." "Spring 2027," nods J.D.) Monitoring behavior is Vanessa Bayer as Sibby, a tightly wound administrator with an effortful smile, whom Turk calls "the feelings police." (A longtime favorite of this department, Bayer is a brilliant addition. Told that Tarzan is a fictional character, Sibby replies, "I wouldn't be so sure. They did make a movie about his life.")

'Scrubs'

Rating: TV-PG

How to watch: 8 p.m. ET Wednesdays on ABC (and streaming on Hulu/Disney+)

They say you can't go home again, but with a good map and a good crew you can get pretty close. Not every bucket drawn up from the well of old IP will prove potable, but it often has: "Arrested Development," "Veronica Mars," "Party Down," "Roseanne/The Conners," "Frasier," even "Dallas." "Twin Peaks: The Return" is, of course, a work of art. Under the watchful eye of creator Bill Lawrence – later to co-create "Ted Lasso," which is coming back for a fourth season even though it really ended after the third – with Aseem Batra, who wrote for the original series, as showrunner, it is very much the sitcom of old, older. (But everyone still looks good.)

There will undoubtedly be some who find nits to pick, but it's hard to imagine any less-than-obsessed fans unhappy with this lagniappe, apart from its comparative brevity. And references to the original run notwithstanding – appletinis, "Star Wars," a certain closet – it's intelligible and funny on its own terms, and as full of love as ever. "When this work makes you fall apart," says J.D., narrating, "someone is there to patch you up."

New viewers will not be shut out.

MOVIE REVIEW

'Scream 7' a horror for otherwise sturdy franchise

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

It's almost hard to describe how astonishingly bad "Scream 7" is – though it isn't entirely surprising considering the circumstances surrounding the film and the lead-up to its production. In 2023, Spyglass Media Group summarily dismissed franchise reboot star Melissa Barrera, who anchored 2022's "Scream" and "Scream VI," for posting on social media in support of Palestinians. Shortly after Barrera's firing, co-star Jenna Ortega departed the film, as well as new director Christopher Landon.

In the wake of the shake-up, Spyglass eventually lured original "Scream" queen Neve Campbell (who had co-starred in the 2022 "Scream" but sat out the New York City-set "Scream VI") back to the franchise in which she has played Sidney Prescott for three decades. Also returning is Kevin Williamson, the original film's writer, who was tapped to co-write (with Guy Busick and James Vanderbilt) and direct, his first directorial effort since 1999's "Teaching Mrs. Tingle."

Usually all of this extra production context isn't necessary to explain how and why a film doesn't work, but here it seems relevant in grappling with why "Scream 7" is such an incoherent mess. Perhaps they were stuck scrapping for parts, or rushed, or working under the dark cloud of the backlash to Barrera's firing (there have been calls to boycott the film). Whatever the case, the result is easily the franchise's worst effort, riddled with muddled motivations, inconsistent characters and a serious identity crisis.

'Scream 7'

★

MPA rating: R (for strong bloody violence, gore, and language)

Running time: 1:54

How to watch: In theaters

The fifth and sixth installments are loosely connected to this seventh film by the presence of the unusually tenacious twins Chad and Mindy Meeks-Martin (Mason Gooding and Jasmin Savoy Brown), who are inexplicably interning for Sidney's longtime frenemy, journalist Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox). There are also several references to Sid "skipping New York," and questions if a Ghostface attack even counts if she's not there.

Because Sidney Prescott, now Evans, exists only in relationship to Ghostface, the costume worn by many different knife-wielding maniacs over the years, starting with her high school boyfriend. Much like Laurie Strode in "Halloween," who shapes her existence around surviving Michael Myers, who is

Jessica Miglio / Paramount Pictures / TNS

Neve Campbell in the movie "Scream 7."

Sidney without the Halloween mask donned by so many of her nearest and dearest? She doesn't seem to know. Her day-to-day life is defined by her trauma – she's a heat-packing woman with a high-tech home security system married to a cop (Joel McHale) – but oddly enough, she doesn't talk about her past with her teenage daughter Tatum (Isabel May). That doesn't seem like Sidney at all.

Instead, she tries to live a semblance of a "Gilmore Girls" life in the bucolic town of Pine Grove, where she runs a cutesy coffee shop and is a wife and mom to three kids, whom she wants to protect from the world and her pesky ghosts. Still, it makes little sense that Tatum (named after Sidney's best friend, played by Rose McGowan in the first film) would know so little about her mom's past. But there's very little about this film that makes sense.

It doesn't help that Campbell and May have all the chemistry of two colleagues who met right before cameras started rolling, and the rest of the cast feels like a hastily assembled group of random actors tapped for their turn on the "Scream" ride. McHale, Ethan Embry, Timothy Simons, Mark Consuelos and Anna Camp are the familiar faces as various teachers, neighbors and news reporters; May, Celeste O'Connor, Mckenna Grace, Sam Rechner and Asa Germann make up the new generation of high school screamers that we barely get to know or care about before Ghostface's blade starts swinging.

Legasequels often try to contend with the larger ideas and evolutions of these iconic properties, and "Scream 7" half-heartedly attempts that. An opening salvo featuring Jimmy Tatro and Michelle Randolph as a horror-obsessed couple seems to set up a cautionary tale about murder tourism, but that theme is quickly abandoned. In the series' characteristic – yet now obligatory – bit of self-reflection on the genre, characters thumb their noses at "nostalgia" and the "retconning" of the Sidney Prescott story, only for the script to toy with just that, introducing a deepfake AI subplot. For such a self-conscious series, "Scream 7" doesn't manage to impart any kind of insight about itself. It's nothing more than an episode of "Scooby-Doo."

Distracting from the void at its core are the extremely gory kills, splashed with pixelized blood and guts that are indeed successful in making an audience squirm. But there's no escaping the nagging feeling that it seems like Williamson fed "Scream" into an AI chatbot and the machine spat this wretched thing out – it has all the familiar components but doesn't move right, sound right or feel right; it's not funny, or scary, or suspenseful. "Scream 7" is an unfortunate tarnish on this otherwise sturdy franchise's legacy.

BOOKS

LordHenriVoton / Getty Images

Publisher enlists 'bookfluencers' to choose its titles – is it working?

By MALIA MENDEZ
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

When young adult author Courtney Summers got the rights back to her backlisted titles in 2024, she initially wasn't sure what to do with them.

Summers' novels, the bulk of which enjoyed peak popularity in the 2010s, had by then faded into the periphery – despite a film adaptation of her 2012 zombie thriller "This Is Not a Test," which is slated to be released in theaters Feb. 20. But the Canadian author felt they still had potential.

That's how she wound up pitching a "Taylor's Version"-style rerelease of her backlist to a handful of desired publishers. Under this model, Summers would publish lightly revised versions of her old books – "make the background vocals stronger and the guitar richer," so to speak – in the hopes of reanimating her work and reaching a new generation of readers.

Her unorthodox plan had one fledgling publisher's name all over it – Bindery Books.

Co-founded by book marketing veteran Matt Kaye and former Becker&mayer! editor Meghan Harvey, Bindery Books is a publishing startup and membership platform that integrates influencer marketing into the book publication process. Unlike traditional publishing houses, Bindery operates via a handful of influencer-led imprints, designed to better serve reader interest and take the burden of book promotion off under-resourced authors.

"Bookish creators wanted to figure out how to build a career doing what they love. Authors want to reach an audience," Kaye said. So he and Harvey decided to play matchmaker.

Bindery currently houses 12 imprints helmed by book influencers, or as Kaye called them, "tastemakers." Oftentimes, these atypical acquiring editors grew their online book communities for several years before landing at Bindery.

Kathryn Budig, head of the speculative fiction imprint the Inky Phoenix, started her online book club of the same name in 2020. She published her first title with Bindery in 2024.

When Bindery's acquisitions director Shira Schindel brought her Summers' backlog last year, Budig first pulled "This Is Not a Test," the most speculative of the bunch, and was immediately hooked.

"I read it, I went back to Shira and was like, 'Give it to me. Mine. Mine,'" she said.

Since then, Budig has labored tirelessly to stoke enthusiasm for Summers' book among her Inky Phoenix community members. Her genuine pride in Summers' work, and eagerness for it to succeed, is tangible in every post and promotional video – just like Kaye and Harvey imagined.

The trust between Summers and Budig was immediate, the latter said: "We started a dev[elopmental] edit before we even inked the papers."

It was a completely different publishing experience than Summers was used to, she said. Her previous publishers had been either too overworked or unbothered to treat her and her work with the respect she felt she deserved.

Under Budig's wing, Summers said she was cared for and included in editorial decision-making, in part thanks to a project manager – a role typically not seen at legacy publishing houses. The author added that for the first time in the 14 years after its publication, "This Is Not a Test" is a Kids Indie Next pick.

For the Bindery team to make that happen, she said, "they pulled levers I can't imagine would be possible in a more traditional model."

Few of Bindery's authors have Summers' high profile or sizable backlog. Instead, nearly all of its titles are debuts, and about a third of its authors are unagented, Kaye said. Last year, several Bindery books hit bestseller and year-end lists.

Kaye attributed Bindery's success to its nontraditional model, which by leveraging so-called "bookfluencer" reach integrates reader sentiment into the publication process rather than attempting to anticipate it – as many publishing houses still do.

"Part of what we're trying to do is have that immediacy, like, you're not many, many steps removed from the reader," he said. "You're actually in conversation with them every day."

Nina Haines, the tastemaker behind Bindery's Sapph-Lit imprint, said that she solicited member input on the imprint's prospective debut titles before she'd even read the manuscripts. The synopsis that won by a landslide was Kim Narby's "Saturn Returning," expected in May.

Given traditional publishing has historically sidelined queer authors and refused them marketing budgets, Haines said she hopes to be "that person that gets it and fights for it."

Jananie Velu, who heads Bindery's Boundless Press imprint, has similarly aimed to enfranchise underrepresented authors – in her case, authors of color – whom she felt the publishers she formerly worked for never truly gave a chance.

"I spent years butting my head against the wall, like, 'Why can't I get more budget for this author?'" Velu said, adding that her past employers heavily devalued the influence of BookTok and "bookfluencing" on publishing.

"So the idea that I would get to choose the books and really be a champion for those books from day one, I felt was just really exciting," she said.

Jane Friedman, a book industry veteran and author of "The Bottom Line" publishing industry newsletter, views the Bindery model as an effective "middle ground" between traditional book marketing and online influencing.

While the analyst said she was unsure of how scalable it is, she said the publisher's tastemaker strategy "reads as very Gen Z and maybe an indicator of where the industry needs to go to stay fresh and relevant."

Bindery is not yet profitable, Harvey said. But that's on the horizon.

In the meantime, she said, the startup plans to grow – "slowly ... so that every author's needs are taken care of" – and keep pinpointing publishing "blind spots."

"We as an industry tend to go for the surest bets," Harvey said.

"But it's very interesting to me to think about how you could find these really engaged communities around either underexposed or emerging genre interests, [where] readers are there but publishers aren't."

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Feb. 14, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. The Night Prince. Lauren Palphreyman. Bloom
2. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
3. Operation Bounce House. Matt Dinniman. Ace
4. Cross and Sampson. Patterson/Sitts. Little, Brown
5. Throne of Nightmares. Kerri Maniscalco. Little, Brown
6. Wretched (collector's ed.). Emily McIntire. Bloom
7. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
8. Cold Zero. Brad Thor. Atria/Bestler
9. Half His Age. Jennette McCurdy. Ballantine
10. It's Not Her. Mary Kubica. Park Row

Hardcover nonfiction

1. Stop, in the Name of God. Charlie Kirk. Winning Team
2. Of Course It's Good! Jessica Secrest. Page Street
3. Nobody's Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
4. The Invisible Coup. Peter Schweizer. Harper
5. Uncluttered Faith. Joshua Becker. Waterbrook
6. How to Test Negative for Stupid. John Kennedy. Broadside
7. Dog Show. Billy Collins. Random House
8. Strangers. Belle Burden. Dial
9. The Strategic Millionaire (expanded ed.). Armando Pantoja. Wiley
10. The Faith to Flourish. Christine Caine. Thomas Nelson

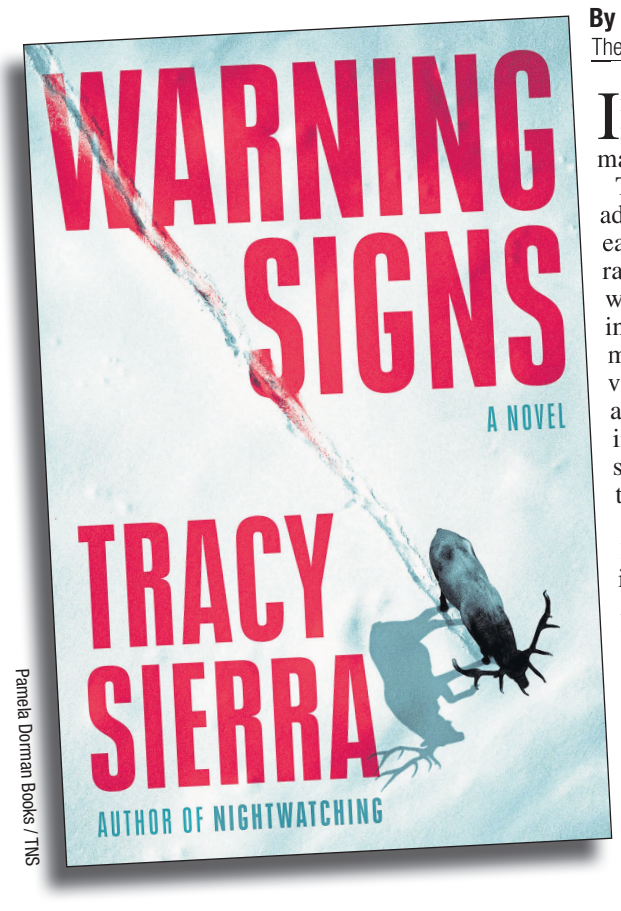
Trade paperback

1. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
2. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
3. Woman Down. Colleen Hoover. Montlake
4. Two Can Play. Ali Hazelwood. Berkley
5. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
6. Just for the Cameras. Meghan Quinn. Bloom
7. A Killing Cold. Kate Alice Marshall. Pine & Cedar
8. Taming 7. Chloe Walsh. Bloom
9. Releasing 10. Chloe Walsh. Bloom
10. Reminders of Him. Colleen Hoover. Montlake

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

The 'Warning Signs' are there in entertaining mountain thriller



Pamela Dorman Books / TNS

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

If you're looking for a book that feels more like a movie, "Warning Signs" may be just the ticket.

The visual terrain of Tracy Sierra's adventure novel is so vivid that it's easy to picture it on a big screen. Sierra's follow-up to the riveting " Nightwatching " is set atop a mountain and in a nearby cabin, where a handful of men and two boys have planned a ski vacation with a hidden agenda: Bram, a shady venture capitalist, intends to indulge the other men in an exciting skiing vacation while also hitting them up for investments.

Bram's shy, resourceful son Zach, 12, is the main character in "Warning Signs," and the key to its appeal. Zach's mom recently died and he was closer to her than to his dad (she taught him everything he knows about skiing and mountain survival).

Zach's wariness of his tough-talking father, who presents many reasons to be wary, his deep knowledge of how mountains and avalanches work and his continuing grief because of the loss of his mother all play into how "Warning Signs" unfolds, as the adults make risky choices and disaster, inevitably, ensues.

"Nightwatching" was such a big hit that Sierra deserves credit for trying something new with her second thriller, even if it's not quite as successful. She easily could have written another book that built tension from claustrophobia – "Nightwatching" was about a woman trying to protect her kids from intruders in their home, where most of the book took place. Instead, she did the opposite. She has found the fear factor in a wide-open space.

Mostly, it works. Sierra knows a lot about skiing and about avalanches, which are a constant threat in the book. The characters can see for miles as they slalom down mountaintops, but what they can't see are the fault lines and crevasses that could make the ground beneath them collapse at any moment. The exception is Zach, whose late mom taught him well how to "read" the appearance of snow on a mountain for signs of danger.

There is lots of danger in "Warning Signs." Probably too much. The threat of natural disaster, coupled with the violent secrets being kept by the adults on the ski trip, would be plenty for any book. But Sierra gilds the snow lily with a few too many red herrings: a shadowy creature that Zach believes is some kind of monster, a missing woman, furtive talk of murder, and "The Shining"-like descriptions of Bram as a person whose malevolent shadow personality always threatens to take over.

With the snowy setting and a climax that pits a child against his increasingly manic father, there are several echoes of Stephen King's "The Shining." And, as in "The Shining," our youthful protagonist has a superpower that could save the day – although, unlike Danny's supernatural gift in "The Shining," this "power" is easy to relate to because any of us could acquire it if we took a course in avalanche awareness. Like many an appealing hero, Zach also has this up his sleeve: He's constantly underestimated by the people around him.

My suspicion is that the "Warning Signs" movie I'm inventing will discard one or two of those elements as unnecessary. I wish Sierra had, too, because the strength of her entertaining novel is its likable, modest hero and the villain he can't escape from – because he's the man who's supposed to be protecting him.

AUTOMOTIVE

NAIVETY BREEDS INNOVATION

How Ford's 'skunkworks' team is designing a more efficient EV

By BREANA NOBLE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Ford Motor Co. engineers assigned to work on the Dearborn, Mich., automaker's new electric vehicle platform often take several months to transition to the group's different approach to vehicle development, the team's executive director said.

Ford a few years ago broke off a small team of engineers and designers it called "skunkworks" in California to develop an affordable EV that could compete against Tesla Inc. and low-cost, subsidized and technologically advanced Chinese competitors threatening global market shares. The resulting Universal EV Platform, which will launch next year with a midsize pickup starting at $30,000, represents cost savings through 20 percent fewer parts, 50 miles of longer range through aerodynamic improvements alone and internet-connected technology that stays up to date.

Culturally, it was a transformation from the way Ford has done vehicle development for decades, with checks, processes and bureaucratic steps ingrained into the structure over time. Skunkworks freed workers from those historic constraints with the goal of innovation and efficiencies.

But it raised question about whether employees in Dearborn could be left behind. Alan Clarke, advanced EV development's executive director, said the group is working on bringing its learning to the overall company over time.

"There's not going to be any sort of light switch where it's like suddenly you see all the impacts to Ford," he said during a virtual briefing with reporters. "Over a multi-year period, as proof points come out, as relationships are built, you'll see a lot of cross-collaboration that ultimately impacts and benefits both models."

The advanced EV team benefits from Ford's history of vehicle dynamics and industrialization, while it seeks to bring to the greater Ford a more agile and innovative way of thinking. Parts for the EVs will be reused on hybrids and internal combustion engine vehicles, Clarke said.

There are employees in Dearborn working on the advanced EVs. The UEV group uses the same industrialization team as any other product. But they've been "pulled out of the mothership," Clarke said, emphasizing the importance of environment and working in an open collaboration space, which was a core part of the design of Ford's new global headquarters in Dearborn. It creates a rotation that over time will result in diffused learnings throughout departments.

"We just culturally have to separate it, especially during specific phases of the projects, because even in the architectural phase, some naivety breeds that innovation, and innovation ultimately is what is going to help us win," Clarke said. "Curious first principles engineers ultimately are the ones that are most likely to find those innovative new solutions."

Ford Motor Co. / TNS

Alan Clarke, Ford Motor Co.'s executive director of advanced EV development, virtually stands in front of a prototype illustration.

First principles, Clarke said, refers to rethinking the approach and asking questions like: What is the best way to do this, or what's the function I'm trying to provide? It's not working within an existing structure, but potentially creating new processes or tools to accomplish the work in the best way, he said.

"Culturally, it's a really big shift," Clarke said, "and it takes even the people that we pull out of Ford to be part of this team, it takes them three to six months to transition and to free their mind from, 'OK, there's this thing I want you to do. OK, what's the process and tool that I should use in order to do that?'"

The result has been removing "silos" of functions, with different departments instead working side by side to find solutions. Clarke describes a "democratization" of information that gives employees greater access to a wider swath of data from 3D computer-aided designs to test results.

A key example is how the group approaches tradeoffs, which it calls bounties. Traditionally, engineers or teams have ownership of a particular component or system. They advocate for it and improve it to decrease the cost, but often without the context of how it affects the customer's experience or vehicle performance. As a result, the best of what each person or group oversees can come into conflict with another, like the aerodynamics team wanting a lower roof to decrease drag, while the occupant package group wants more headroom, and interior designers say a smaller cabin size reduces costs.

Bounties change the goal by connecting it to yielding the best vehicle range and battery cost. All teams have the same goal, knowing that adding 1 millimeter in height to the roof is $1.30 in battery cost and 0.055 miles of range, Clarke explained.

Engineers described how detailed this became. Shrinking the side view mirror body by more than 20 percent added 1.5 miles of range. Positioning the front tire wake directly toward the rear tires to hide them from wind gained another 4.5 miles.

"It doesn't sound a lot, but these marginal gains add up," Saleem Merkt, advanced EV aerodynamics senior manager, said in a blog post.

They have added up to a 15 percent range improvement over the 2025 Ford Maverick truck and the 2022 Hyundai Santa Cruz, and a 30 percent gain at highway speeds. Half of the aerodynamics team come from Formula 1, and borrowing strategies from racing, the group 3D-printed parts to test and understand how each component would affect the end result.

Inside the vehicle, Ford developed in-house a zonal electrical architecture. To put it simply, it reduces the number of computers in the vehicle that control seats, infotainment, windshield wipes, power conversion and anything else that uses electricity to five main modules. It means less reliance on suppliers to update the vehicle, and shorter wires. The UEV's wire harness is 4,000 feet shorter and 22 pounds lighter than Ford's first-generation products.

"How do you compete with the Chinese?" Clarke said. "First of all, you understand your customer really well. You understand what they want. ... They want a software-defined vehicle that continues to improve over time, with more featured content and more capabilities. Our focus has been on giving them everything they would get in a nice vehicle and more, and we think that that'll allow us to ultimately not just make an affordable vehicle, but make one that's extremely desirable."

Whether or not what Ford has accomplished on the UEV will convince customers, especially after the federal plug-in vehicle tax credits have been abandoned and carbon emissions and fuel economy regulations have been pulled back, remains to be seen, said Peter Richardson, vice president of research at industry analysis firm Counterpoint Research, in a note.

"Ford has recognized that a radical shift is needed – in design, manufacturing, and it is taking steps to make that transition," he said. "But rather than following, for example, German manufacturers' approach that leads to relatively high-priced cars, Ford has gone back to first principles in an effort to rekindle the ideas that made the Model-T such a transformative product for ICE era automobiles – not only in terms of affordability, but also production process innovation."

The zonal architecture also contributed to 25 percent fewer fasteners alongside the two unibody castings that make up the body of the vehicle. They represent two parts to Maverick's 146 parts. Others have used a similar approach to manufacture vehicles, but Ford highlights its model as being 27 percent lighter than the Tesla Model Y crossover, using less aluminum.

In 2023, Ford also acquired Auto Motive Power, bringing high voltage power electronics architecture and design in-house for the platform. It developed the "ebox," which converts the battery's 400 volts to the 48-volt system – Ford's first over the traditional 12-volt battery that operates in-vehicle electronics – and shares components with the vehicle's fast-charging infrastructure. A single module also manages power distribution, battery management and bidirectional charging for powering a home during an outage. The system consolidates sensors and auxiliary supplies.

"China might have some supply chain advantages, but ingenuity will win in the long run," Anil Paryani, Ford's executive director of engineering and former CEO of AMP, said in the briefing.

The work translates to faster charging speeds, longer battery life and improvements in cost of ownership, he said.

The only other vehicle selling in the United States with a 48-volt system is the Tesla Cybertruck, though it's been discussed in the industry for years. The system reduces the thickness of copper wires, and Clarke said its' the future of the industry, despite parts not yet being widely available.

"This vehicle is not just a great EV, it's going to compete with the best on the gas vehicle side," Clarke said. "We expect that we'll see a lot of customers coming from outside of pickup trucks and really attracted by the price, but also the utility of having a place to put really big stuff.

AUTO REVIEW

2026 Nissan Sentra SR: Quietly capable while you dream of something else

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

The 2026 Nissan Sentra has been redesigned, which means that a committee spent several million dollars rearranging the same basic shapes and then issued a press release. Will anyone notice? Nissan dealers will, because they have inventory to move and quotas to hit. The rest of civilization will politely squint and walk past it.

The 2026 Nissan Sentra arrives with a rounded roofline, a sunburst grille that's actually rather handsome, and a black roof, which is the modern equivalent of those vinyl roofs your uncle insisted made his Plymouth look classy. The overall effect is that the Sentra looks very contemporary, very presentable, and very much like it's trying hard to be invited to a party where nobody will remember its name.

Pricing starts less than $24,000 and then climbs obediently through the alphabet soup of trims until my SR test car ringing in at a faintly surprising $31,945, which, in today's automotive world is considered reasonable, much like a $14 airport sandwich is described as a good option.

And what do you get for thirty-odd grand? Not speed. Not prestige. Not the ability to silence your neighbor who begins every sentence with "Well, in BMW engineering …" No. What you get is equipment. Lots of equipment. Yet a status symbol it is not. No valet has ever sprinted toward a Sentra with the enthusiasm of a Labrador spotting a tennis ball. It does not inspire envy; it inspires spreadsheets.

Yes, it's loaded: heated seats, heated steering wheel, wireless phone charging, dual screens, leatherette upholstery, LED lights, fancy wheels, you know, the works. And yet the overall ambiance is less luxury lounge and more recently renovated dental waiting room. Everything is clean, pleasant and perfectly acceptable. But you're still aware that somewhere nearby, a drill is whining.

Up front there's plenty of space, and the seats are supportive enough that your spine won't file a formal grievance. In the back, two adults can fit, provided they're prepared to negotiate legroom like diplomats at an international summit. Taller passengers will become intimately acquainted with the seatbacks ahead of them.

The trunk offers a sensible 14 cubic feet of cargo space, though in a masterstroke of corporate optimism there is no spare tire, just a repair kit, which is Nissan's way of warning you not to run over anything sharp.

Mechanically, much of the new Sentra is reassuringly familiar, which is to say it's about as adventurous as reheated lasagna. There's a 149-horsepower four-cylinder engine driving the front wheels through a continuously variable transmission, otherwise known as a rubber band attempting to impersonate a gearbox.

The suspension – struts up front, multi-link at the back – does its job with quiet competence. Nissan says the structure is stiffer and the dampers updated, and indeed the car rides agreeably, corners capably, and maintains its composure with the sort of calm efficiency you'd expect from someone who files their taxes in January. But entertaining? No.

The cabin is impressively quiet, the steering is pleasantly weighted, and the whole thing feels solid. Yet the powertrain delivers acceleration with all the urgency of a polite cough even as the throttle is oddly sensitive, making steady cruising feel like balancing a teaspoon on your nose. Driving it with enthusiasm is technically possible, in the same way enthusiastic bookkeeping is technically possible. Fuel economy during my time hovered around 28 mpg, which is decent, though a bit shy of official promises, rather like a politician's.

And before you ask, no, this is nothing like the old hot Sentra SE-R of the nineties, that brief and glorious moment when the car had a pulse before the accountants arrived with clipboards and a firm belief in moderation. Even selecting Sport mode now feels less like unleashing performance and more like expressing optimism.

Still, there's something admirable about the Sentra. It feels durable, dependable, and utterly unfazed by the indignities of daily life. It doesn't thrill or boast. It simply turns up, does the job, and goes home, which, frankly, is more than can be said for most of us.

So yes, the 2026 Sentra is better than ever. Which means it will continue to be heroically overlooked, quietly serving millions of sensible people who will never put it on a poster, never brag about it at dinner, and certainly never name a child after it. Because in a world obsessed with horsepower, giant SUVs, and questionable life choices, the Sentra is the responsible adult: neatly dressed, punctual, and destined to be politely ignored while everyone else makes a fool of themselves.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

2026 Nissan Sentra SR

Base price: $31,945

Engine: DOHC 2.0-liter four-cylinder

Horsepower/Torque: 149/146 pound-feet

EPA rating (combined city/highway): 32 mpg

Fuel required: Regular unleaded

Length/Width/Height: 183/72/57 inches

Ground clearance: 4.8 inches

Payload: 917 pounds

Cargo capacity: 14 cubic feet

Towing capacity: Not rated

Larry Chen / Nissan / TNS

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Great sound for anyone

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

At first glance, **Fosi Audio's ZH3 desktop HiFi DAC/headphone amp/preamp** seems built for advanced users. To an extent, it is. Still, you don't have to be an audiophile to want great sound. The ZH3 is designed to make premium listening accessible to all. It lets everyday listeners use advanced sound features without the usual complexity.

The compact AC-powered unit features a digital-to-analog converter and a headphone amplifier, and it functions as a preamp for speakers and amplifiers. Whatever you choose, the ZH3 delivers as advertised and integrates seamlessly with headphones, speakers and gaming consoles.

It features almost every input possible with ports on the front and back. They include coaxial, USB-C, optical and RCU. Outputs include 4.4 mm, 6.35 mm, RCA and XLR. There's also a plug to connect the included DC 12-volt AC power adapter. The ZH3 incorporates several advanced processors to deliver high-resolution audio and support additional functions, so users must choose which features to enable.

This can include simple tasks such as sending audio from a source like your smartphone to individual speakers, or just improving the sound from your headphones. Once you choose your task, the rest is straightforward.

Before setting it up to achieve both better audio with **Fosi Audio i5 Planar Magnetic headphones** (more on the headphones below) and then sending audio to RCA-connected speakers, I watched a video on the Fosi Audio site. One thing that stuck with me was when they referred to the ZN3 as a device that is a little different but will take care of my audio issues. And it absolutely did that.

The ZH3 has a black body and a small footprint (9.45 x 11.81 x 2.76 inches). The front features an orange multi-function button and a small display for easy menu control. There is also a remote control that duplicates most of the multi-function button functions.

I'm far from being an advanced audio expert, but I do know a lot more than the average person. With that in mind, I set up the ZN3, knowing most users would consider it an advanced unit. While it is, I can say that you don't have to be an advanced user to set it up and get advanced audio.

ABOVE: The front of the Fosi Audio ZH3. **RIGHT:** Audio i5 Planar Magnetic headphones.

In a few minutes, the ZH3 gave me a dramatically different sound in my headphones, more suited to my listening style. You can easily adjust bass, treble, UAC (User Account Control) and choose from 6 digital filters.

As for the Fosi Audio i5 Planar Magnetic headphones, WOW!

Before doing anything with the Fosi Audio ZH3, I had the i5 Planar Magnetic headphones playing. It's hard to say they are the best set of headphones I've ever tested in my nearly three decades of testing products, but if not the best, it's in my top three. I haven't tested many high-end hi-fi headphones like these, so that may be part of it.

Either way, the clarity and detail from any playlist I put to the test is second to none at any volume, coming from 97mm drivers. They also have an attractive look with a handcrafted walnut wood chamber to house the drivers and extreme craftsmanship throughout, including durable cables.

The open back, adjustable high-strength memory metal headband is adjustable and flexible to a comfortable fit. The earcups feature soft memory foam for all-day comfort, and each side rotates in multiple directions to fit securely on any head size or shape.

The studio-grade audio adapted well to any adjustment. I prefer a strong bass, which, in other headphones, causes clarity to break down. This wasn't the case at any volume level. The clarity remained consistent at any adjustment and volume, including head-banging settings.

The i5 Planar Magnetic headphones have it all: first-class sound, comfort, and a solid, durable design. and attractive appearance. Audiophiles will love these.

https://fosiaudio.com/products/zh3-dac-headphone-amp-preamp $199.99, $549.99 for the i5 Planar Magnetic headphones

The back of the Fosi Audio ZH3.
Photos by Fosi Audio / TNS

I just want to hear the old Alexa

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service

We use Amazon's Echo device at my house, mainly for voice control of our smart home devices like lights.

Recently, Amazon introduced their new and improved Alexa service called Alexa+, which is designed to be more conversational and have expanded capabilities.

Alexa+ is included with certain new Echo devices and for Amazon Prime subscribers.

Other users will be able use Alexa+ for $19.99 per month.

We can explore the new AI capabilities of Alexa+ in another column. Today I want to talk about the first thing everyone notices when the switch is made.

The new features of Alexa+ include a new default female voice that sounds faster and perkier than the original Alexa.

Everyone I've talked to so far has remarked about Alexa's new voice. Most of them want the old voice back.

The Alexa+ service comes with eight voices and you can change between them at any time.

The new default voice for Alexa+ seems to be called Feminine 1, upbeat. She's perky and speaks a bit faster than original Alexa.

If you'd like old Alexa's voice back, you can just ask Alexa to change the voice to Feminine 2, which is described as Relaxed.

Also available are Feminine 3, described as Inviting, and Feminine 4, which Amazon calls Grounded.

The four male voices are Masculine 1, Friendly; Masculine 2, Warm; Masculine 3, Smooth; and Masculine 4, Calm.

You can also see the voice choices and hear a sample of what they sound like by going to the settings page for your Amazon Echo in the Alexa app on your phone.

Each Alexa device in your house has its own voice selection, so if you have multiple Echoes, like me, you have to change them all.

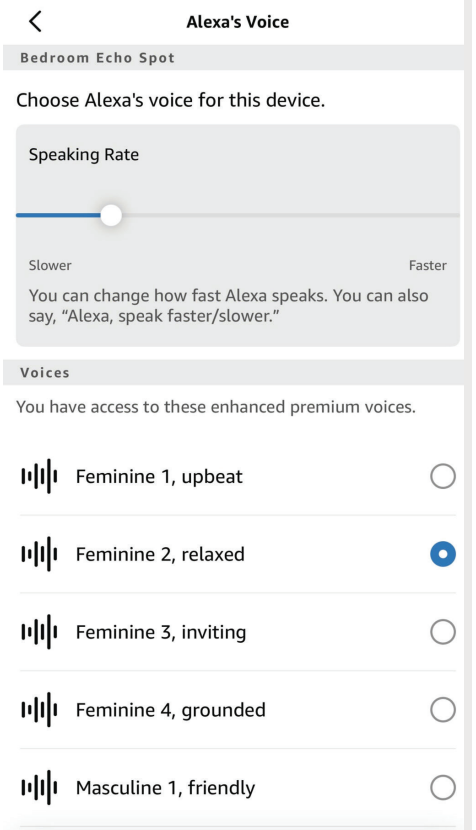
Recently, Amazon introduced their new and improved Alexa service called Alexa+, which is designed to be more conversational and have expanded capabilities. Alexa+ is included with certain new Echo devices and for Amazon Prime subscribers. Other users will be able use Alexa+ for $19.99 per month.
Jim Rossman / TNS

Also, I noted earlier that the new default Feminine 1 voice spoke a bit faster, which makes her a bit harder to understand (at least to my ears).

You can actually ask Alexa to slow down or speed up her speaking voice to your liking.

If you want to get Alexa back to sound like her old self, ask her to change to Feminine 2 and then tell her she's speaking too fast and to slow down.

She will.



Chitose Suzuki / The Dallas Morning News / TNS

Quincy Preston of Dallas Innovates takes a photo of a display of a dire wolf at Colossal Biosciences on Feb. 12 before a tour of the company's new headquarters in Dallas.

Colossal's new HQ helps company be 'in your face' with de-extinction mission

By SASHA RICHIE
The Dallas Morning News (TNS)

An animatronic dire wolf looks around then tilts its head to greet you in the lobby. An animated megalodon shark circles its prey in a conference room made of floor-to-ceiling screens before striking and "breaking" the glass.

With design details in every nook and cranny, the headquarters of Colossal Biosciences feels no less sci-fi than the startup's mission: to bring long-lost animals back from extinction. But behind its doors, there is hard science happening every day.

"You have literally every single piece of equipment you could ever want at your fingertips," said chief science officer Andrew Pask. "This is the thing that makes the difference in really being able to push this technology forward at a fast pace."

Colossal, based in Dallas, recently allowed media to tour its new headquarters and lab, which the company is unveiling after a phased move-in beginning last June. The 55,000-square-foot space (not to mention 4,000 square feet of additional animal management space downstairs and a 30,000-square-foot lab expansion already in the works) is a significant upgrade from its old digs, a 25,000-square-foot area in what co-founder and CEO Ben Lamm called the "WeWork of labs."

Colossal employs 230 scientists and researchers, and the new space unites all of Colossal's main teams under one roof. Besides its genetically engineered dire wolves, which live in a nature sanctuary outside Texas, there is lab and office space dedicated to Colossal's ongoing projects to resurrect the dodo bird, moa, woolly mammoth and thylacine.

Don't ask where the lab is, though, because the startup won't tell you.

"When we announced the woolly mice, we had people show up to one of our other locations, and they were like 'Can we see the little mice?' ... or when people knew Peter (Jackson) and I were speaking in Cannes, we had people show up and wait at our hotel," Lamm said. "We're excited about the communication, but also, you know, we're not open to the public. This is not a theme park, it's our offices."

It's not surprising the movie star-like following Colossal has attracted. After all, the company counts the likes of Tom Brady, Sophie Turner and Chris Hemsworth as public supporters and investors.

But even with the side effects – and ensuing precautions – it's all part of a carefully curated branding strategy.

Take a look at Colossal's website and you'll notice a very distinctive design language. The same language permeates the new headquarters, with murals on nearly every wall, screens and LEDs galore, and that unique family of fonts labeling everything from the cell culture lab to the bathrooms.

Lamm said that brand identity is something that's been curated from the very beginning, with a "Harvard-meets-'80s MTV" vibe to convey science that's as fun and irreverent as it is cutting edge. In the office, that identity fosters a dynamic environment where anything can happen. In the public sphere, it earns buy-in, because communicating Colossal's mission to address biodiversity loss and conserve the environment has always been almost equally as important as the science.

"We don't compete with like science journals for attention and eyeballs. The people that want to be scientists at the right, appropriate age are reading the science journals, but we compete in the attention economy with Kardashians, right?" Lamm said.

That may sound cynical, but listening to Lamm, possessing a background in AI and gaming, proudly explain a laundry list of engagement metrics, it's clear the philosophy is working.

"Sentiment analysis," he said, yielded 97.5 percent positive sentiment, and a string of percents within percents helped pinpoint what the 2.5 percent were mad about. ("You can't please everybody," Lamm said.) Perhaps the money stat: according to Lamm, 30 percent of Colossal's investors invested because their kids told them about the company.

"Our view is that it's not our job to persuade, it's our job to educate and be transparent, and we hope through actions, not words, people come on that journey with us," he said.

That journey is only accelerating. About a year ago, Colossal hit a $10 billion valuation, and has since padded its purse with even more funding, bringing the total to more than $600 million. Since launching in 2021, it has started the Colossal Foundation, spun off two companies, and acquired another. It also officially expanded to Australia and announced a permanent museum installation in Dubai, all in the past six months.

All that investment has already paid off in the form of woolly mice and dire wolves born through genetic engineering. And though the ultimate payoff of living woolly mammoths and dodo birds may be years or even decades away, there is more to be had sooner with the application of Colossal's de-extinction technologies to non-de-extinction problems.

"If we're going to get to a future where we can feed 10 billion people on this planet, we need people to understand and accept GMO foods. But people obviously are a little bit worried about putting something in their mouth that they don't fully understand," said chief science officer Beth Shapiro as an example.

In its own way, the animatronic dire wolf in Colossal's new lobby, just like the company's ever-presence in media and attachment to pop culture, helps that.

"I think one of the beautiful things about Colossal is it gives people an introduction to what it means to do genetic modification in a way that is safer and more acceptable. We're helping animals not become extinct ... and this is the same technology that we can use to make a drought-resistant tomato," Shapiro said.

"Having that conversation out loud, I think, is a step toward helping people to better understand what we can do," she continued. "And I love that Colossal is doing that by being so in your face."

"I think one of the beautiful things about Colossal is it gives people an introduction to what it means to do genetic modification in a way that is safer and more acceptable. We're helping animals not become extinct ... and this is the same technology that we can use to make a drought-resistant tomato."

BETH SHAPIRO
Chief Science Officer

HOME&GARDEN

DESIGN RECIPES

Back in black

Chunky black coffee tables help to make a bold statement in this living room.
Cathy Hobbs / TNS

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Black has become one of the hottest and most used colors in architecture and interior design. From the exterior of a building to tile, cabinetry and fixtures, black remains one of the most fashion-forward finishes.

Here are some tips to make black a part of your decor:

1. Use black as an anchor and key foundation color. Black works to not only ground a space but also to add a sense of elegance and luxury.

2. Look for ways to add black in as accents: accessories, artwork and textiles.

3. Use black to create a sense of stark contrast, such as pairing black with white, cream or even light gray

4. Select black furniture pieces as foundation pieces or to add a focal point to a room.

5. Mix finishes such as matte and glossy to add a sense of depth.

6. Use black to define zones within a space such as using black furniture to visually define lounge, dining and sleep areas.

7. Use sprinkles or "pops" of blacks as an accent color.

8. Use texture elements such as textiles to integrate sprinkles of black.

9. Incorporate black through the use of finishes such as cabinet hardware.

10. Consider lighting with black elements to add a sense of richness to a space.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

ABOVE: A black nightstand helps to make a statement in this master bedroom. **LEFT:** Black and gold barstools provide a sense of contrast in this modern kitchen.

What are some home projects that improve everyday life?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Saving just a little bit of time every day can make a big impact on your life over time. Luckily, there are a few home projects that can help you save time and energy on a daily basis.

A good place to start is by looking at your daily chores to see what can be automated or made more efficient. For example, if you spend several minutes pre-rinsing dishes every night, it might be time to invest in a new dishwasher. Modern dishwashers are both efficient and effective, so there's no reason to pre-rinse your dishes before throwing them in.

If you spend a lot of time managing your lawn, swapping from grass to low-maintenance ground cover may be a good choice. While grass offers a classic look, it requires regular maintenance that can take up a lot of time. If you don't enjoy lawn maintenance, or if you don't just have the time, look into low-maintenance landscaping, like gravel, native plants or turf.

Adding some smart home features to your home is another easy way to save some time. You can get a robotic vacuum/mop to clean your floors or a smart thermostat that automatically keeps your home at a comfortable temperature.

Vladimir Stanisic / Dreamstime / TNS

Appliance upgrades, smart home automations, and landscaping design changes can make your life easier in the long run.

If you want to take on a larger project, or if you are already planning a remodel, you have even more options. For example, you can swap out carpet or hardwood flooring (which both require specific cleaning to maintain) for a lower-maintenance tile or vinyl flooring. These materials are durable and easy to clean, so you won't have to spend extra time maintaining your floors. Similarly, you can upgrade from a higher-maintenance countertop material, like butcher block or concrete, to a fuss-free, low-maintenance material like quartz.

Unfortunately, not every aspect of your home can be easily automated or made to be low-maintenance. In those cases, you can hire pros for the work on an ongoing basis, which can help reduce the mental load associated with the task. For example, you can hire professional cleaners to clean your home every week at the same time, so you don't have to worry about that task getting done. This philosophy can be applied to cleaning, pest control, lawn maintenance, HVAC maintenance or any other ongoing tasks.

Home maintenance, while important, can sometimes feel like it's taking up all of your time. By prioritizing efficiency and bringing in help when needed, you can save your energy for the things that matter most.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

TRAVEL

Why does train travel feel so special?

Readers share their best memories

By CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

First I wrote about my recent train ride on the Southwest Chief, Los Angeles to Chicago in 43 scenic, surprising hours.

Then came the train stories from readers and friends on social media. Stories involving a sitar, a surfboard, several root beer floats and a bride-to-be. Another one features Ray Bradbury as a guest star.

Could this be proof that train trips are special, that they resonate more deeply in our bones than other journeys do?

Maybe. Or maybe this just shows how thirsty we are for a chance to turn away from current events for a moment.

I'm guessing it's both. We gathered more than a dozen of these train stories, with some light editing. Whether you're settled into an armchair or considering your own journey on Amtrak, Canada's VIA Rail or the ritzy Rocky Mountaineer, here are some of our favorites.

Joe Raedle / Getty Images / TNS

Passengers enjoy the sightseer lounge car on Amtrak's California Zephyr during its daily 2,438-mile trip to Emeryville/ San Francisco from Chicago on March 24, 2017, in Denver, Colorado.

The sitar in the club car

"Summer 1978. I took Amtrak from Oakland to Boston and back. Took the D & RGW [Denver and Rio Grande Western] railroad from Ogden to Denver – the most magnificent leg of the journey, through the red-rock canyon country of Utah, into the verdant mountain meadows of Colorado, disappearing into the long tunnel under the Rockies, opening out to spectacular Boulder Canyon.

Those were the days of train travel before uptightness about safety and liability. I went between cars, opened the dutch doors, hung my head outside to enjoy the breeze, listened to the clickety-clack, and smoked a joint and watched the world go by.

From Boston headed home, I met up in the club car with members of a rock band, a secretary, a Peace Corps guy just back from India, and a retired dentist, and we partied night and day, telling stories and laughing our asses off. The Peace Corps guy had a sitar, and would play morning, noon and evening ragas as America rolled by outside. ... It was bliss! When thoroughly exhausted, I rolled out my sleeping bag under a table and seats in the club car to sleep. I don't think I spent any time in my assigned seat for the whole trip.

When I got to Oakland, my girlfriend picked me up, and was boggled that I could not stop laughing for days."

Jim Burklo, Ojai

When the author steps up as you're reading his book

"One time in the 1970s, when I went to college at San Francisco State University, my father, Aaron – who rode the rails out of necessity in the Great Depression and frequently traveled from coast to coast as a paying customer in later years – took the train from Los Angeles to visit me. He was sitting next to a teenage boy who was reading a book by Ray Bradbury.

To my father's great surprise, Ray Bradbury walked up the aisle and saw that the boy was reading one of his books. Bradbury was delighted and stopped to talk. The three of them had such a great conversation that Bradbury invited my father and the boy to lunch on the train. My father enjoyed this chance encounter so much that it was one of his favorite memories and it became a story he loved to tell."

Irene Lechowitzky, San Diego

A global train song

"My best memory so far was sharing wine and singing "City of New Orleans" with three strangers – two German tourists and a fellow American – in the cafe car while riding Amtrak's City of New Orleans train northward from New Orleans in 2023. The Germans knew more of the lyrics than I did. It was a meta moment. Music truly is the universal language."

Jane Engle, Los Angeles

At the window with grandsons

"Just for fun, I took a round-trip ride with grandsons from Oceanside to San Diego on Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner. We cruised across lagoons, paced freeway traffic going faster than us and rolled along ocean bluffs that give the train its name."

Don Bartletti, Vista. Bartletti served as a Pulitzer Prize-winning Los Angeles Times photographer from 1984 to 2015

After Arizona glory, a pause in Kansas

"One December, I took a solo trip on the Southwest Chief from LAX to Chicago. Winter scenes along the way included waking up at dawn to the glory of Arizona red rocks inches from my window. On the return trip, the train was delayed in dreary sleet in Dodge City, Kansas. Rumor has it there was a cow on the rails. It was a thrill to finally feel the gentle forward jolt of the cars and to get the hell out of Dodge."

Lisa Moske, Torrance

Tag, root beer floats and trouble in Albuquerque

"When I was 8, my mom and I rode the Santa Fe Super Chief from Union Station in L.A. to Chicago and then changed trains and rode to Toronto, Canada. I remember being afraid to board the train; it was so huge and scary at first. Mom settled in to her recliner seat and I met many kids in the viewing car. These kids would be my best friends for the next four days. We ate BBQ chips and drank root beer floats in the dining car, and played tag throughout the train, much to the disapproval of the conductor.

At our first stop in Albuquerque, my mom wanted to disembark and buy souvenirs. I was afraid to leave the train and thought it would leave without us. I had some kind of meltdown and refused to get off the train. Mom had to stay on the train with me. She never got a silver necklace and I wish I could go back now and buy souvenirs with her. Miss you, mom."

Carol Templeton, Los Angeles

A forbidden surfboard on a Mexican train

"Manzanillo, Mexico, 1978. Train to Mexicali. An American surfer managed to drag his surfboard onto the train, even though it wasn't allowed. He hid it in the bathroom for a while, but the conductor was bound and determined to find it and throw the surfer off the train. The board ended up outside the windows, with three passengers secretly grabbing onto it through the windows. I got off the train before Mexicali, but I like to think he made it to the border."

Mark Orwoll, formerly of La Mirada, now of Pleasantville, N.Y.

Note: The Mexicali-Guadalajara train, which stopped at dozens of cities, including Manzanillo , on its roughly 1,300-mile route, ceased operation in the 1990s. Here, from The Times archives, is another tale from that route.

On the way to St. Tropez

"My most insanely romantic trip. I was 25, in Paris by myself and decided to take the high-speed train to St. Tropez. Just to see it. I bought a ticket but found myself on the wrong train, and about to be thrown off by an angry agent, when I was rescued by a young man heading home to Grasse to visit his parents. He told the conductor (in French, of which I did not have the foggiest) that I was with him, and that we would share his couchette.

It was an overnight train. There was one cot. They winked at each other. I was something of a hostage if I stayed. But stay I did.

We stood there and we stood there and we talked all night long. Neither of us ever sat on that bed. He was smart and funny and his English was perfect. He said he worked on Francois Mitterrand's security team. By the time the stars stopped flying by and we stopped in Grasse, I was pretty taken by him."

Pat Field Ravasio, Corte Madera

Strangers on an Indian train

"2003 riding a local train in India. Nobody spoke any English and the train was full of families and men traveling village to village. When we entered the train, it took a while before we found a compartment in which to put down our things – nobody would make room. After we finally found a place to sit, and after many minutes of awkward silence, my husband took out his digital camera and the room transformed.

Everyone wanted their picture taken, alone, in groups, with us... And suddenly we had a dozen smiling fiends sharing snacks, clambering over each other to get their photo, people coming from other cars, kids... Still couldn't speak a word to them, but it was wonderful."

Irene Salter, Palo Cedro, Ca.

On a single journey, the Coast Starlight, Empire Builder and Southwest Chief

"In 1997, I had just completed my first semester as an elementary school teacher for LAUSD, and I was both overstimulated and burned out. I decided to make Amtrak trains my home-away-from-home for six days.

I took the Coast Starlight out of Los Angeles up the coast, and enjoyed some truly spectacular scenery of the Pacific as we went north. I then boarded the Empire Builder, which would take me across the top of the country to Chicago. The scenery included amazing views of the Columbia River Gorge that have stayed seared into my brain forever. Scenery in Montana was equally beautiful, but what I will never, ever forget is the bleakness of the prairie, starting in eastern Montana, all through North Dakota, and into western Minnesota. Hours and hours and hours of grass, grass and more grass. Desolate and beautiful simultaneously. I could imagine trying to cross it in a covered wagon and just being overcome by the never-endingness of it. I've read that some pioneers got "prairie fever," which was a mental breakdown caused by the profound sense of isolation, and died by suicide because they couldn't take it anymore. I had no trouble believing it.

Once out of the prairie in western Minnesota, the scenery got more conventional, with more towns, as well as larger cities. I was seriously worried about not making my Chicago connection, but Amtrak actually held the Southwest Chief. I boarded, and it started to move before I even made it to my roomette.

So I wouldn't miss anything worth looking at, I had bought myself a wonderful book called "Rail Ventures: the Comprehensive Guide to Rail Travel in North America." Armed with this book and a good camera, I was able to be in the observation car to photograph what I wanted to see. My roomette was cozy, but not cramped, and best of all it was quiet. I spent my days and nights napping, seeing fantastic scenery, eating all my meals in the dining car as part of the cost of my roomette, and catching up on my reading. My time belonged entirely to me, and the constant motion was both exciting and reassuring.

The United States is a huge country, and you don't get a sense of that by flying from one coast to another in five hours or so. But when you spend 12 hours seeing nothing but prairie with not a person, car or structure in sight, you realize what an amazing country we all live in."

Joel Parkes, Los Angeles

In L.A., a surprise along the tracks

"A number of years ago, my wife and I took a sleeper car from L.A. to Portland and back, just for the experience. The scenery was incredible, especially in the sky dome car. Eating meals in the dining car with another couple each time was also a highlight. We met people we never would have otherwise, and talked about our lives. Getting rocked to sleep in a comfortable bed while gazing out the window is not to be missed.

But one thing came as a complete surprise: While traveling slowly through the L.A. metro area, many of the buildings and the concrete along the tracks were covered with graffiti. Not just crude tags in black paint either, but mile after mile of elaborate multicolored creations worthy of being called works of art, by talented but unknown people. I was shocked at how good much of it was. All in all, it was among our favorite parts of a memorable experience!"

Jim Okerblom, Escondido

Tamales, tacos, churros and cactus candy

"My fondest memories were those traveling home to San Diego from UCSB in the early '70s. I loved the easygoing and picturesque ride along the ocean and stopping halfway in L.A. before continuing on to San Diego. There was just enough layover time for me to walk over to Olvera Street, have a good tamale or taco, do a little shopping and pick up cactus candy or a churro for the rest of the ride home. That halfway stop was a highlight and made the four-hour trip that much more enjoyable. I always looked forward to that little taste of Mexico."

Sheryll Nuffer Roonan, Fairfield, C onn.

The Rocky Mountain rainbow was just the beginning

"You expect spectacular scenery while riding the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, the highest, longest and most authentic narrow gauge train that steams for 64 miles through the Rocky Mountains, crossing the border of Colorado and New Mexico 11 times. But nothing prepared us for a trip in late May, where, after slowing down to cross a trestle with views in one direction, we had a 180-degree rainbow in the other, and then steamed into a herd of a thousand sheep that caused the train to eventually stop while they passed, much like the transcontinental railroad often had to stop for buffalo herds.

Northern New Mexico has many Basque sheep herders who drive the herds to higher ground at the beginning of the summer, and we had the good fortune to run into one. Almost literally."

Rich Grant, Denver

Vendors in the aisles, tequila up ahead

"I remember coming across the Sierra Madre Occidental on the way to Guadalajara from Nogales, with a train car full of deportees and stops in Mazatlan and Tequila. At each stop some new vendor would walk through selling tacos, horchata, live chickens… you name it. One 25-cent per liter of tequila led to another and next thing we know, we're hanging with the locals from El Salto, Jalisco, for a month. Great people, priceless adventure! I still cherish the photos. What's happened to this once-quaint village is criminal."

Elena Jarvis, Glenwood, Fla.

P.S. This is another Mexican passenger train that's no longer running.

Chasing family history across Canada

"In 2008, my wife, my then-7-year-year-old daughter and I were going to take Amtrak from Los Angeles to Chicago, but the Amtrak booking agent screwed the reservations up so badly that we instead decided to take a train from Montreal to Vancouver.

There was some poignancy to this, as my grandmother was a picture bride from Greece. She had grown up on a small Dodecanese island and crossed the Atlantic in the 1920s. For the last leg of her journey, she took a train from Montreal to meet my grandfather (for the first time) in Vancouver. They met on a Saturday and married on a Monday in a Russian Orthodox Church. Experiencing the same journey that my grandmother had taken seemed like a good vacation hook.

Montreal was our point of departure, an enchanting city with fantastic food and charming denizens. After a few days we headed out to Toronto on a commuter-style train. It was perfectly adequate, but not particularly enchanting, and certainly not what my grandmother would have traveled on.

In Toronto, my daughter and I had afternoon tea at the Fairmont Royal York across from the train station, where we embarked on a more picturesque excursion.

We had a triple compartment. It was located in a stainless-steel streamlined car that was built in the 1950s, spot on for our little family of Midcentury Modern enthusiasts. We saw the train snake through Ontario forests, felt it rumble along Canada's midwestern plains and then head up through the spectacular Canadian Rockies. There were plenty of bear, elk and other wildlife sightings along the way. We ate surprisingly good food like trout and pork chops for dinner. At night we watched train movies like "Murder on the Orient Express."

We got off in Jasper, the Yellowstone of Canada, filled with glaciers, craggy mountains, waterfalls, rivers and spectacular vistas. We took bike and horseback rides. When I admonished my 7-year-old for complaining too much during a particularly wonderful excursion, she retorted, "Daddy, complaining is my passion!"

After a few days we got back on the train and headed to Vancouver. This was another scenic parade of mountains, rivers and forests.

In Stanley Park I pondered my grandmother's voyage. Our trip was one of leisure. Hers was a life decision to escape the bleak prospects of an island girl."

George Skarpelos, Los Angeles